

MARY JANE'S VACATION



CLARA INGRAM JUDSON

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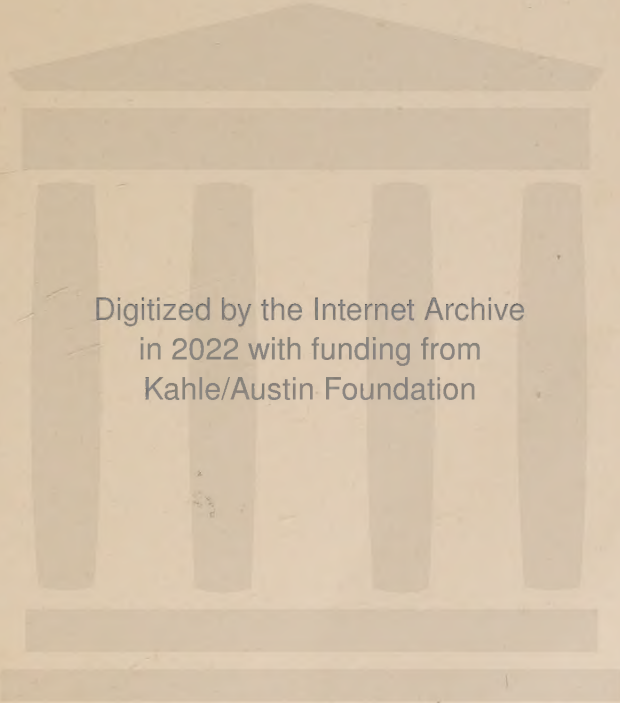
To Norma Helen

From

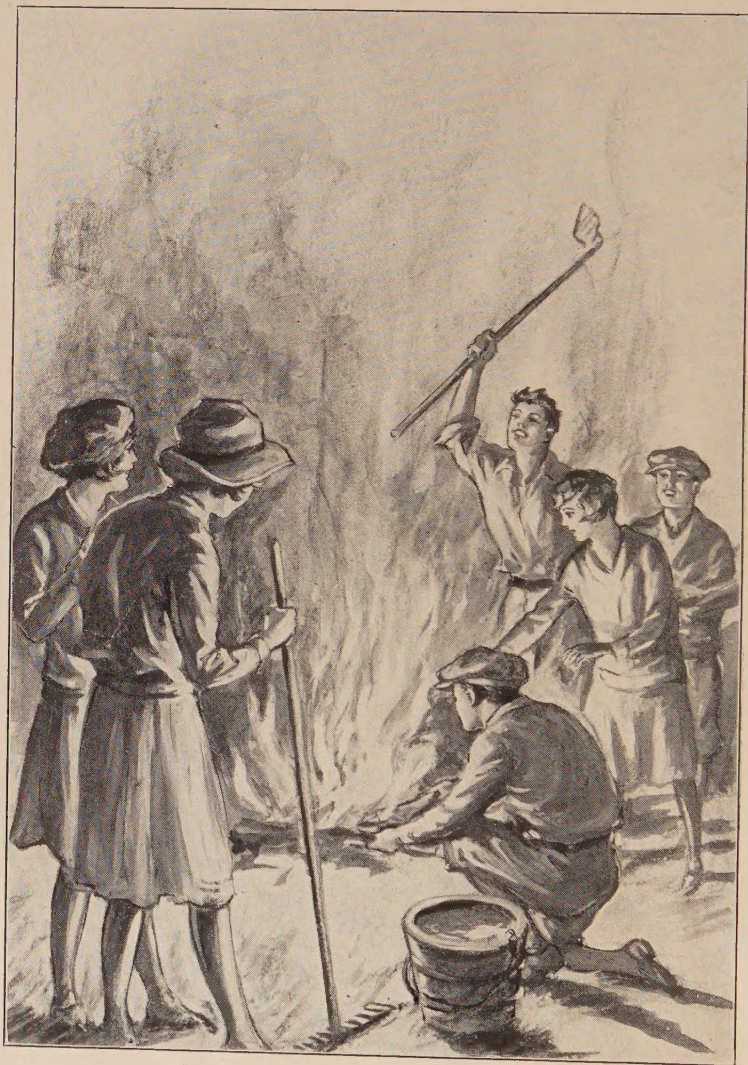
Mom & Daddy.

Xmas 1928

when you were
10 yrs old.



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In a flash there was a glowing mound of flame.

Mary Jane's Vacation

Frontispiece

MARY JANE'S VACATION

BY

CLARA INGRAM JUDSON

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"THE JUNIOR COOK BOOK," "VIRGINIA LEE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY
CHARLES L. WRENN

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MARY JANE'S VACATION

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Dedicated To
JANET CARLE INGRAM

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MARY JANE'S VACATION

THE FIRST SIGNS OF SPRING

MARY JANE! Mary Jane! Can you come over to our house this afternoon?"

Mary Jane paused to listen.

"Mary Jane! Mary Jane!"

Yes, someone was calling, but, from her room in the front of the Merrill apartment, it sounded very faint and far away—who could it be? Then the little girl remembered. It was Betty, of course, and quick as could be Mary Jane put down the doll whose hair she was tidying and ran to the dining room balcony to listen.

"Mary Jane!" This time Betty's voice sounded very plainly and Mary Jane opened the dining room door, stepped out onto the little balcony and replied, "What you want, Betty?"

"Can you come over to our house this afternoon, Ed wants you," explained Betty.

"*Ed* wants me," asked Mary Jane, practically, "what for?" Not without finding particulars would she promise anything for she had planned to use this rare half holiday for something very special.

"Yes, and he wants Alice, too," said Betty, positively. "We just planned it. He's going to have a garden party and it begins at one o'clock and there's a surprise at the end, so you'd better come."

Mary Jane thought quickly. If Alice was going (of course she would for she loved playing or working with the Holden children) she wouldn't be at home for doll sewing as Mary Jane had hoped. Anyway, the threatening clouds of early morning were all clearing away and it would be much more fun playing out than in—much.

"Yes, I'll come," she promised. "What are we going to do?"

"I said a garden party," repeated Betty.

"But garden parties are summer things and it's hardly spring yet," said Mary Jane, doubtfully.

"This is a garden party just the same," insisted Betty "and I'll not tell another thing because Ed said not to. So you come at one o'clock and you'll see." And with that Betty ran into the house to eat her luncheon.

Mary Jane stood still a minute and looked hard across her neighbor's yard. She thought that was a goldfinch she spied in a tree in the yard just past Betty's. But she couldn't be sure—maybe it was only a flash of sunshine on a bit of damp bark for it surely was early for the birds to come. Before she could look again, Alice called that luncheon was ready and she went inside.

"Betty's having a garden party," she said to her sister, "is winter over?"

When Alice said that it surely was, Mary Jane was both glad and sorry—glad

because she loved the warm sunshine and the jolly summer things the Merrill family always did; sorry for she had had the best winter she had ever known and any little girl would be rather sorry to hear that it was ended even if a good time, a very, very good time was just ahead.

Maybe you have read about the fun this certain little girl had during the winter just ended. It was all told in the book just before this one—called “Mary Jane’s Winter Sports.” If you have, you know about the coasting and the winter picnics and the other recent happenings in the Merrill household. When you think of all that out of door fun, you can easily see why Mary Jane’s cheeks were so round and rosy even though the winter had been long and cold. She had played out in the fresh air more than an hour every single day and that is enough to make any little girl (or boy either, for that matter) feel fine and grow fast the whole year through.

Only that same morning, Mrs. Merrill, who was looking over Mary Jane's closet to see that her frocks were mended and clean, had remarked, "I shall have to let down hems or put facings on every dress you have, Mary Jane. I never saw such a big girl as you are getting to be !"

Mary Jane was thrilled as Punch for she thought (for a minute) that maybe now she would catch up with Alice—you know Alice is her big sister who is nearly ready for high school. But then her mother went to Alice's closet and said the very same thing—it just seems as though you never catch up with your big sister, do you? Not that it makes any real difference, but you know you always would *like* to.

Yes, winter sports certainly do make a little girl get roses in her cheeks to say nothing of the good times that are so jolly. So, if you know about all that fun, you are not one bit surprised to hear that Mary Jane was in no hurry for spring to come along

and finish the melting of the last piles of snow that hugged tight against the north sides of houses and fences. She didn't have much to say while eating her lunch for thinking about the good times, winter picnics, coasting parties and such, which now she wouldn't be having.

But Alice was chattering away about gardens and a new dress and hat and an outing party for the earliest wild flowers, so first thing Mary Jane knew, she was forgetting all about winter and was talking too, not about the good times she had had, but about the ones that were coming. And everyone knows that, fun as it surely is to talk about fun you have had, it's still more fun to talk about jolly times that are ahead.

"What kind of a garden party can a person have when there isn't any garden yet?" asked Mary Jane, suddenly remembering that she hadn't asked Alice about Betty's plan for the afternoon.

"You mean Ed's party?" asked Alice, guessing rightly what was in her sister's thought. "I think there's a catch to that somewhere. There isn't any garden except the mussy old one left over from last summer and goodness knows with all the snow and playing over it and leaving stuff around as Ed Holden has done, there's nothing very garden-party-ish about their back yard right now.

"But when I asked Frances what Ed meant, she was right there when he asked me to come over, she just giggled and said, 'well, you know Ed. He has an idea. I'd love to tell but I promised not to so don't make me. You come over and see if you don't die of laughing when you find out what it is.'"

"That sounds fun," said Mary Jane, much pleased.

"Yes, but there's something to it," insisted Alice, "I just know from the way they looked at each other. But I wouldn't miss

it for a penny. It will be some joke on us, but we'll like it—you know Ed."

Yes, Mary Jane did. The Merrill girls had not lived next door to such nice neighbors as the Holden family without finding out a thing or two about them. There were five children, two girls, Frances just about Alice's age and Betty, Mary Jane's. The boys were before and after and in between, as Mary Jane put it, and the five children had many a good time together in the Holden back yard, or their big attic playroom or the Merrill living room and kitchen. Of course the Merrills, living in a city apartment, had no yard or attic to play in and that made it even more jolly to have such fine neighbors right next door.

The promise of one of Ed's funny surprises was enough to make Alice and Mary Jane hurry through the lunch dishes. Mrs. Merrill put the food away, tidied the ice box and the kitchen while Alice washed and

Mary Jane wiped the dishes and in ten minutes' time everything was in ship shape. Mrs. Merrill resumed her sewing while the girls ran down the back stairs and through the hole in the fence into the Holden's yard.

There was Ed waiting for them and lined up by the side of the back porch was the funniest row of "party favors" (as he called them) you ever saw! Two rakes, two brooms, one trash basket, one pair of great clippers, a box of matches (set carefully on the porch steps), a hoe and a big basket.

"Take your pick, ladies and gentlemen!" he called, grandly, as his brothers and sisters came out of the back door just as Alice and Mary Jane ran across the yard, "the party is about to begin."

"Pick! Party!" teased Frances. "I don't see anything I want to pick and as for a party—where did you say it was, Mr. Holden?"

"Right here in this yard, right now," an-

nounced Ed, in no bashful terms. "Miss Holden takes her choice of a rake or a broom and she begins work at once."

"Oh, she does, now think of that," laughed Frances.

"Is this what you call a 'party'?" demanded Alice, giggling. "Explain yourself, maybe we won't come."

"Oh, yes you will, and there's a surprise at the end that you can't have unless you work—don't forget that, Miss Neighbor.

"Look at this yard," he added, with a flourish of his hand that started them looking around critically. "Is it very beautiful? The answer is 'no!' Is it going to stay that way long?"

"The answer is 'no.' Not if Ed can get somebody to clean it up!" interrupted Ed's older brother.

"Right you are," laughed Ed, "and he's got them now for he's having a garden party for that very purpose. Fall to, people, take your rakes and brooms and see who can

clean the biggest space in the least time. Now, scoot!"

Not one of those six children had thought they wanted to do anything so workish as to clean up the winter's muss from a big back yard, but Ed put it in such a jolly way that each made a grab for a tool and went to work. Betty and Mary Jane chose brooms and began at opposite ends of the walk—that was pretty far apart but both girls had good healthy voices and distance didn't stop their chatter. Frances and Alice took the rakes and tackled the leftovers from last summer's garden patch and the odds and ends of trash the winter's storms had blown hither and yon. Lindsay, the older brother, took the clippers and set to trimming the bushes and hedge, Ed used the hoe to chop down some of the things that were too big for rakes to manage, while little John used the basket to follow up the older girls and start a great pile of trash in the very middle of the garden.

With seven people working that way, you should just have seen the winter's dirt fly! In half an hour the yard looked quite different from the messy place it had been that very morning and in an hour it was so clean that the workers had to hunt around for something more to do—positively, there wasn't any more dirt to move!

"Do we have to go home now?" asked Alice, teasingly, when she looked around at the tidiness their fun had made.

"I should say not," exclaimed Ed. "You wouldn't be allowed to leave this yard. The party is really just beginning."

With a final kick at the edge of the great pile of trash in the middle of the garden plot, he ran into the house and in a minute appeared with a bucket full of water and two pint cups. While the children stared in amazement, he set these down near the trash pile and then ran back for the box of matches, that had been waiting all this time to be used.

"Oh, I know! I know!" exclaimed Mary Jane, clapping her hands. "We're going to have a fire!"

"That we are," said Ed, as he struck a match and touched it to the edge of the pile. The trash was as dry as tinder and in a flash there was a glowing mound of flame beautiful to watch and warm and jolly to stand by.

"Mind the sparks," warned Lindsay, as he went into the house; his scout meeting was that afternoon so he couldn't stay longer.

"That's what the bucket of water is for," said Ed, knowingly. "So don't you worry, we can tend to ourselves and the party isn't over, either."

THE END OF ED'S PARTY

MARY JANE was gald to hear that the party wasn't yet over. For a minute there, when Lindsay went away and when the fire blazed so big and fast but was so soon to be gone, she was afraid that would be all there was to the afternoon's fun. But Ed's words assured her there was more to come.

Just then the back door opened and Mrs. Holden came out onto the porch.

"Dear me, dear me!" she exclaimed, "I never saw such a tidy yard! And aren't you all speedy workers! I thought it would take at least half the afternoon."

"Not for people such as I have working for me," replied Ed, grandly. But his grandness soon vanished when he had to run and dodge to miss a broom-beating

Frances and Alice laughingly threatened to give him.

"Work for you—fiddlesticks!" teased his big sister. "Work for a surprise, you mean. And where is it? You promised that if we cleaned the yard, you would have a fine surprise. Here's the clean yard—where's the surprise?"

"Fair enough," admitted Ed, who, even though he was clever in getting people to work for him was also very square in keeping promises he made. "Only you can't have it with dirty hands and mine are terrible. Meet you back here in five minutes." And he dashed into the house without another word.

Now the children all knew perfectly well that Ed was no dandy and they couldn't ever remember his suggesting a washing-up stunt, regardless of the state of hands or face. So, more curiously than ever, they each hurried away to wash, too—they weren't going to miss anything, not they!

When they turned up, some five or six minutes later, Ed was standing on the top-most back step, admiring the tidy yard.

"That's what I call good," he announced. "Yard all clean and only a little more than an hour to do it in. Everybody having a good time, too. Now if I had done it myself, I'd have worked all morning—and afternoon maybe—been lonesome as the dickens and the back drop wouldn't have been painted."

"The *what?*" exclaimed Frances.

"Wouldn't have been *what?*" cried Alice, in the same second.

"The back drop wouldn't have been painted," repeated Ed, very casually though the twinkle in his eye betrayed plainly enough that he knew he had said something most unusual.

"Ed Holden!" exclaimed his sister Frances. "You can't keep us in the dark any longer. You know you have been up to something in the front room of the attic

and you know you've got to tell sometime, so you might as well right now."

"How you would like to rush a fellow," said Ed, who seemed to feel that he must grumble in order to be manly. "Now it just happens that I intended to tell you in about one minute, so you are hearing it just when I planned and not a minute sooner. What do you 'spose I wanted you to wash up about if it wasn't to paint? Now come up stairs and see."

They needed no urging. Indeed, so interested and surprised were they that even Betty was quiet and followed the line that trailed up the stairs to the second floor and on up the narrow stairs to the third, without a single question. And what do you suppose they saw when they arrived at the closed door of the front room?

Nothing but darkness. Every shade was pulled down tight.

"Will you promise not to laugh?" demanded Ed, who much as he loved

teasing others, was very sensitive himself.

"You know we won't, Ed," Alice assured him. "You know we always like what you make. Only what is it? Do let us see."

Thus assured, Ed quickly raised the two window shades letting in plenty of brilliant afternoon light.

Against the north wall of the room was hung a curtain made of strips of cambric tacked on the rafters. On these strips, Ed had painted strange brown and green lines that, while they weren't a bit like trees, really, certainly made a person think of trees the minute they were seen.

"It's a forest," cried Mary Jane, delightedly. "Did you do it all yourself, Ed?"

"What's it for?" asked Betty.

"Can't we do some, too," demanded Frances.

"Not so fast," laughed Ed, being very careless in manner though a bit of a tremble in his voice showed that he was much excited.

"Yes, it's meant for a forest—for trees, lots of them. It's for a play. And you can all do some, too, if you like."

"Now Ed Holden," said Frances, firmly, as she seated herself on a big box with an air of staying all afternoon till she knew everything there was to know, "you know you have some new idea and you might as well tell us all about it as to go beating around the bush as you are now. What's the big idea?"

"Well, you know that last play we had at school and how much fun it was to do the scenes and rehearse and everything?" The children all nodded for while only two of them, Ed and Alice, had actually been in the play, the whole school knew about it and had watched and listened enviously while the others rehearsed, painted scenes and made costumes.

"That was so jolly," continued Ed, "that I thought we might as well do a play at home—think we could?" This last was a

bit anxious for now that it was time to share his idea with the others, he wasn't nearly as sure that it was a good one as he had been when he had thought over it by himself.

"Oh, Ed, of course we could!" exclaimed Alice, delightedly. "Why didn't we ever think of it before? Frances and I can make costumes, you can do scenery—"

"I guess I can do some myself, Alice Merrill," interrupted John, eagerly.

"Of course," agreed Alice, "that's just what I was going to say. And Betty and Mary Jane can help and—"

"We can do a play so well, so very well, that maybe we can act it at school, too," planned Frances.

"Oh, yes," said Mary Jane, getting carried away with all this planning, "and we can invite people to come and see and—"

"And make a regular stage," said Ed.

"Well," said Alice, "if we are going to do all of that we had better start to work without any more sitting around and talk-

ing. Ed you tell us how much you have done and what you are going to do and then we'll see."

"It isn't much," replied Ed, a bit modest now that he saw his idea was pleasing everyone so highly. "I painted the forest because most stories have a forest in them—anyway lots of them do. What do you think we could act first?"

"Cinderella is my favorite only it hasn't any forest," said Mary Jane.

"Oh, we have to have a forest," insisted Betty, "'cause Ed has such a good one."

"Hensel and Gretchel is my next favorite," continued Mary Jane, "and it has a big forest—a dark and gloomy one—a regular forest."

"That would be wonderful," exclaimed Frances, "We can have the old witch's house and the forest and three of us can act while the others change scenes and tend to things. That's a fine idea, Mary Jane."

"Only the witch's house is made of candy

and we couldn't get enough candy to make a house—not even a stage house,” objected Betty, who down in the corner of her heart was already a bit sorry that she hadn't thought of Hansel and Gretchel herself.

“Silly!” laughed Ed, “we'll *paint* a candy house. Don't you see, this all has to be pretend, not really truly *anything*. Real candy would spoil it even if we had enough.”

“Which we haven't,” Frances reminded him, laughingly.

“How'll we paint a candy house?” asked Betty.

“We'll make the house first,” replied Ed. “Now you all come with me out into the store room and see what we can find.”

The back part of the Holdens' attic was a large, not very well lighted room where all sorts and conditions of things were kept. There were trunks of clothes and boxes of books and papers and piles of magazines and toys and games—you know the kinds of

things that get saved when there is an attic in which to save them. The children rummaged through and through; they looked behind trunks and around toys and over bundles, not a sign of anything that looked the least bit like a witch's house did they find.

"Here's that paper I saved last fall," cried Frances, disgustedly. "I rolled it up so nicely and was going to use it for wrapping my Christmas gifts. And of course when Christmas came I forgot all about it and bought some new. Now isn't that silly?"

She unrolled neat sheets of clean, smooth wrapping paper and looked at it half heartedly.

"Here's Lin's jumping posts," remarked John, as he set out two tall posts—the kind that have tiny holes in the side for holding the pins that support a rod laid crosswise for high jumping. "I'll bet as soon as the ground is soft, he'll want those down in the

yard for practicing." So he set them out handily, near the door.

"Oh, I know!" exclaimed Ed, as suddenly the idea for the witch's house occurred to him. "We can take your paper, Frances, and tack it onto Lin's posts and make a house."

"Now Ed," said Betty, disgustedly, "you know paper doesn't make a candy house."

"I know it does, you mean," replied Ed. "At least it will before we get through painting it. We'll tack the paper so," and unrolling Frances's package, he stretched the sheet of paper between the two posts, "and then we'll each paint some candy on it and it will look—well, you just wait and see."

There was no doubting after that. John helped carry the posts into the front room, Frances dashed down stairs for hammer and tiny tacks, Alice ran home for her paints and brushes and in ten minutes the children were hard at work scene making.

Ed tacked the paper in place with the

posts about four feet part—that would give about the right size house for the stage space they could have. He made it just high enough to hide the head of any of them who might happen to stand behind. Then Frances and Alice, with Ed's help in measuring, marked off a door and a window. Those were to be painted brown for the door and white for the window. All the rest was to be candy—a whole house of candy.

By the time the painting could be begun, Mary Jane and Betty had hunted up a box of paints and a brush for each person and Ed marked off a space where each could work so they could tell just what to do and where to do it.

"What kind of candy shall I paint?" asked Mary Jane, as she was ready to begin.

"Your favorite kind," said Ed, "everyone has to do her favorite."

"My favorite is butterscotch drops and they are so brown looking to paint," said Mary Jane, doubtfully.

"My favorites are red peppermints and they are lovely to paint," said Betty, beginning gleefully to paint red balls on her part of the paper.

"I like mints," said Mary Jane, thoughtfully, "and I like candied cherries and I like orange slices and I like lemon sticks and I like—"

"Well, that's plenty to begin with," laughed Frances, "so start with those and if you can't think of any more, I'll let you paint one of my favorites."

Without more talk the children set to work and for half an hour they painted diligently till at the end of that time there stood before them—not a sheet of tacked up brown paper, but a house of candy, all sorts and sizes of candy; just the kind of house that you'd know an old witch in a story would like to live in.

"Now," said Frances, with a long breath of satisfaction . . .

But she didn't finish her sentence for at

that very minute, Mrs. Holden's voice at the foot of the stairs called, "Whoo—children! Anyone up there hungry? I've some sandwiches and some fresh, hot cookies down here! Do you know anyone who might eat them up for me?"

"*Do* we?" exclaimed Ed, "I'll say we do!"

And without a second's hesitation the scene painters dropped their brushes and dashed down the stairs for food.

DOING THE PLAY

OF course painting one piece of the scenery was not the only thing that had to be done before the play. While the children were eating the cookies and sandwiches they chattered gaily of all the other work there was ahead. Costumes, for instance, must be designed. What sort of a costume does a witch wear, anyway?

"I think it's all red," said Betty, reaching for another peanut sandwich.

"Bright red with raggedy edges and a tall red hat," agreed Mary Jane.

"Who's going to be who?" asked John and everybody stared, each at the other because *of course* each person there, whether they were girl or boy, had thought she or he was going to be the witch.

"We can't all be the witch," said Alice,

suddenly realizing that if this play business was going to continue to be fun they would have to take turns doing the best parts. "I borrow to be scene shifter this first time and then to get my pick of parts next time."

"That sounds awfully fair," said Frances, "only I know something even better. Let's each be witch and each girl be Gretchel and the boys can each be Hansel and we'll watch each other and then, after everyone has tried, we'll vote to see who is the best—of course we'll all be *good*, but surely someone will be *best* and then they shall act when we do before folks."

That seemed a beautiful plan, so very good that there was no use trying to think of a better one. So instead, they talked about costumes again.

"We can make the witch costume big enough for anyone of us and tuck it up when Betty or I wear it," planned Mary Jane.

"I think Gretchel should wear a white

dress," suggested Betty, "she'd look like such a very nice little girl that way."

"Or blue," said Frances, "and Hansel can wear blue or yellow and a big white collar like a little boy in an old fashioned story book."

"He could wear my new yellow smock," said Alice, generously. "I could turn it up so it would be short and with a round collar of white it wouldn't look a bit like a girl's thing."

"I know something we forgot," exclaimed Ed. "We forgot the cage. Doesn't the old witch put the little boy in a cage while she gets him fat?"

There was silence for a minute while the children thought hard.

"Yes, she does," said Alice, "I remember now. And he sticks out a bone to fool her—don't you know? I think, though that we'd better get out the book and read it over so as to make sure we know it all."

"But there's a cage," insisted Ed.

"Yes, and I know," said Mary Jane, with sudden inspiration. "You know that old fire screen up in the attic? We saw it just as we were hunting a house. We could stand that with the screen part front so folks could see and it would look like a cage—anyway it nearly would."

"That's a peach of an idea, Mary Jane," said Ed. "I can fix it fine, for the screen in the living room is almost the same size and by putting the two together there will be a real cage—almost—and we won't have to think about the front, or back sides at all."

"Now is there anything else?"

"I think we'd better read the story just as you said, Alice," replied Frances. "Let's go into the living room and do that next, Alice and I will take turns reading."

The last sandwich and cookie had already disappeared so the children went gaily to the living room where Frances quickly found the book of old tales while each person picked a favorite chair or win-

dow seat ready for the reading. Never did people sit so still and listen so hard, for, you see, they had not only to hear the story, but also to think fast as the reading went on, to make sure they remembered all the things the play would need.

"Shall we say words in the play or shall we just act?" asked Betty, when the reading was over.

"Just act, this time," said Ed, positively, "because that will be quite enough for us to do. Then, if we get very good, maybe we can do a play and say words in it. But no use trying too much this first time."

"That's the idea," agreed Frances, approvingly, "now let's go back to the attic and start working."

"It's quarter past five!" exclaimed Alice, in dismay, as she just by chance spied the living room clock.

"It can't be, I know it isn't," said Frances, "why it isn't more than three—I perfectly well know."

There was a hasty comparing of watches and clocks in the kitchen and Mrs. Holden's bed room but as every single one said "quarter past five" Frances was forced to believe that the afternoon had gone—though where it went to, goodness only knows!

"We shall have to fly home," said Alice, "we should have flown—that's a sentence that ought to suit Miss Johnson it has so many pieces of verbs! Anyway, good-by people—Mary Jane and I promised to market for mother this afternoon so we can't even stop to plan when we'll work some more on the play. Come over after dinner and tell us—please." And with that request, she and Mary Jane slipped into their sweaters and ran home as fast as ever they could.

Fortunately, the marketing list was not long this time, but even so, it was nearly six when they got back, just barely time for tidying themselves and setting the table

before their father arrived for dinner.

During the meal there wasn't much talked about but the play. Mr. and Mrs. Merrill heard all about it, of course, and thought the plan great fun.

"I hope you'll have a Saturday afternoon performance sometime, so I can see it," Mr. Merrill said, while Mrs. Merrill offered to help with costumes or anything that should be needed.

"That's darling of you, mother," said Alice, happily, "and I know you could make them better than we can. But I do think that we are old enough to do such work ourselves. So if you will just tell us what goods we may have, or what to buy if we have to buy anything—and maybe show us how to cut if we can't figure it out ourselves, why I think that will be all we need."

"Best idea I have heard yet," approved Mr. Merrill, so heartily that Alice's cheeks turned rosy and she resolved to think

and work her best to deserve such praise.

After dinner, Mrs. Merrill went with the two girls to the piece box under the big window in the pantry and there they found some red goods—just paper cambric Mrs. Merrill had had for a costume years and years ago, but plenty of material for a witch. She planned the lengths and then they went back to the living room where Mary Jane brought her little scissors and snipped and snipped making a raggy fringe along the edge that was to be the bottom of the skirt.

While they were working, Frances phoned to say that her mother didn't think best for them to come over as she had home work she had forgotten and it would soon be bed time. But that they could play the next day after school. It was Tuesday now and surely they could have the play ready for the first acting on Thursday.

But getting a play ready is not such fast work. Ed wanted trees and that meant

pinning brown paper around chairs and posts—he found two more that Lindsay had had. Then sewing a costume takes time. There were no more half holidays and the children had some duties and must play out of doors at least one hour a day. So all together, it was Friday before they could act the first trial.

But that was just as well for when they began, everything was ready and the children had read the play so many times that they knew exactly what should come first and middle and last and of course that made it better.

The first time, John was Hansel, Betty, Gretchel, Frances the witch, Alice and Ed scene shifters and Mary Jane the wind that howled and howled while Hansel was shut up in the cage. Then they changed and the scene shifters and wind took the regular parts and they played it over again.

After much thinking it was decided that

Mary Jane was the best "wind," Alice, the witch, Ed, the boy Hansel, and Betty, Gretchel, so they played it again that way, to make sure.

"Now to-morrow, we'll wear the costumes when we rehearse," promised Frances, who had been appointed "Mistress of the wardrobe" and kept the precious costumes in her closet.

"And can we invite folks to come see?" asked Mary Jane.

"Let's rehearse in the morning, just as soon as our jobs are finished—that'll be about ten," suggested Ed. "Then we can play out of doors till three and have the play at four. Dad gets home by then, always, and he wants to see it."

So promptly at four the next afternoon, parents and a half dozen invited neighborhood children were escorted to the Holden attic where they were seated with great dignity (by John) and furnished with programs (made by Alice and Frances) and

told by the announcer (Ed) that the play would begin in one minute.

You should have seen that play! To be sure, it didn't last so very long—it doesn't take as many minutes to *do* plays as to *say* them, you know. But every part was well done: The old witch looked so ferocious she made a person shiver; Gretchen looked so dainty and sweet you just couldn't bear to think of her dear brother getting eaten up by an awful old witch; Hansel looked forlorn (when the witch was looking) and was positively grown up and clever when he poked the piece of last Thursday's chicken bone out through the crack between the two fire screens for the old witch to feel. As for the wind, it howled so forlornly that you could hardly wait till the poor children got out of that dreadful woods.

Then at the last, when the witch was gone and the children found they could live in that beautiful candy house—well, that was the best possible ending and the audi-

ence clapped and clapped till the actors and scene shifters and even the wind, had to come out and bow and bow to make them stop.

"I think making plays is loads of fun," said Mary Jane, delightedly, when the curtains (made of borrowed dust sheets) had been drawn open again so the audience could continue to admire the candy house and the forest. "I wish we could do it some more."

"I think if you will tell your teacher that you have a play," said Mrs. Holden, "she will let you do it in one of the rooms for a Friday afternoon exercise some day. It's very good and I know the children would enjoy it."

"Oh, is it *that* good, mother?" asked Frances, happily, "well then, I'm going to tell Miss Johnson, for she said just the other day that she wanted some different programs."

"Goody, goody! And I'll come in your

room while you do it," said Mary Jane, "I love going in other rooms."

"Well, then," said Ed, practically, "you may take some of this junk back to the attic 'cause Lin's scouts are coming here to-night and he said we had to set the room to rights if we ever expected to use it again."

"Well, we'll certainly do that, so here goes to make it straight," said Alice.

With a flourish and a bow for all the compliments, the audience was dismissed while the players dashed around putting precious scenery in a safe corner of the attic and costumes into a trunk Mrs. Holden had given them for that use.

Then, with the happy feeling of having done something very well indeed, they all went out for a final game of piggy ball before dark.

ONE THING LEADS TO ANOTHER

IT didn't take very long for the fame of the Holden-Merrill players to spread around. The half dozen children of the neighborhood who had been invited to the performance had been so thrilled that they could hardly wait till Monday morning to tell the others and by recess time, word got to Mary Jane's teacher, Miss Endicott.

"What's this I hear about your doing plays, you and Betty?" asked Miss Endicott, as the children came in from recess. "While the room is settling down to work, you may come to my desk and talk to me about it."

Mary Jane was pleased to know that Miss Endicott was interested, of course, but she was a little panicky, too, for Miss Endicott was a new teacher, that is, new for Mary Jane, as she had only had their room

about a month and Mary Jane didn't feel old friends with her yet, as she had with the other teacher. She hung up her sweater in a jiffy and hurried up to the teacher's desk and soon she was so busy telling her about the candy house and the costumes and everything that she quite forgot the teacher was new and sooner than you would have suspected, she felt very well acquainted.

"I think that sounds wonderful," said Miss Endicott approvingly, when Mary Jane stopped for breath, "do you suppose you could bring the candy house over here and act for us in this room? We'd love it. We could read the story first, in afternoon reading, so everyone would understand and then you could act it. That would be just like having a picture in a story book."

"I think we could," replied Mary Jane, thoughtfully, "but it isn't just mine, you see, Miss Endicott. I'll have to ask the others. Betty's part of it, and Alice and

Ed and Frances and John—we all are in it. I'll have to see if they can, too."

"Of course you will, dear," agreed the teacher. "Now let me see, Alice and Frances are in the graduating class, are they not? They have some drama work as part of their courses. Miss Johnson and I will have to get our heads together about this and maybe we can think up some scheme for both rooms seeing the play."

That was all she said just then, but at luncheon time the two teachers conferred and by afternoon the children were told of the plan that had been made. The graduating class and Miss Endicott's room were to go together for the last period Friday afternoon. They would meet up in a small auditorium called the "little hall" which was plenty big for a hundred children and had the advantage of a small stage, not a real stage, to be sure, but a platform that with a few screens could be made to look very satisfactorily like a real one.

Miss Johnson appointed a committee of boys to carry up screens from the big hall and to provide any properties the players might need.

As you can easily guess, the Merrill and Holden children were much thrilled by all these happenings. They went over their scenery in the attic, touched up the candy house to make it quite perfect, and pressed costumes and generally were busy as bees that whole week. They kept such an air of mystery about the whole thing that the other children in the room could hardly stand being kept out of the fun. But as Miss Endicott reminded one of the girls, there couldn't be a surprise without some people being kept in the dark for a while, and as everyone knows, surprises *are* fun.

Finally Friday noon arrived. The "forest" hung in place at the back of the stage; the candy house looked good enough to eat and the two fire screens were ready for the scene when Hansel should be shut up to

fatten. Every single thing anyone could think of doing was done.

When Mary Jane and Betty went to their room at one o'clock, Miss Endicott told them that she had had a note from the principal giving them permission to spend the first twenty minutes of the afternoon session in the little hall.

"Ed, John, Alice and Frances are also excused," she explained, "so you can go up there at once. You are to have a final rehearsal so as to make sure everything goes well this afternoon. Now tip-toe softly so as not to disturb classes as you go through the corridors."

Feeling delightfully important, the two little girls slipped out of the room, through the echoing halls and up the two flights of stairs to the small hall on the third floor. There they met the others and very silently and snappily they went through with the performance of their play.

"I think we ought to have lines," said

Frances, with a puzzled frown as they finished the last act. "Just acting is all well enough when it is in an attic but at school it seems childish."

"It doesn't to me," said Alice, firmly. "It seems like a movie only alive. I think it might be fun to do lines some day and you and I ought to write some. But there isn't time before the play to-day, so no use even thinking about such a thing. Let's just do it the best we know and the way we have rehearsed and then next time—well, we can see when next time comes."

That was such good advice that there really wasn't anything to be said. So the players went through their acts again, this time a little half heartedly, it must be confessed, because they had done it so much it was hard to keep interested. But no one was worried about that. Just wait till the audience arrived in a couple of hours and there would be interest enough.

The rehearsal over, they set the scene for

the first act, locked the door, returned the key to the principal's office and went back to their various rooms.

With all that careful rehearsing and planning, it's no wonder that when the audience of two rooms assembled after recess, the play was given with great excellence. The audience clapped and clapped and every one of the actors came out in front of the screen and bowed.

As they were working, after school, clearing up the scenery, taking down the paper that made the candy house and rolling it up to take home and packing the costumes in a suit case, Miss Endicott remarked, "What play are you going to do next, children? Surely when you are having such a good time with this sort of fun, you will not stop with the first play you put on."

"I should say not!" exclaimed Ed, with great positiveness. "We're going to do a lot of them. We'll do them all over here at

school for you too, if you like," he added with careless generosity.

"We're going to do Cinderella next," volunteered Mary Jane.

"Oh, we are, are we?" laughed Frances.

"Yes," said Mary Jane, nodding. "You and Alice are going to be the selfish old sisters, Betty is going to be Cinderella and I'll be a lady in waiting at the palace."

"I don't want to be Cinderella, you be it," interrupted Betty. "I don't like to lose a shoe and marry the prince and everything she has to do. I'd much rather just be a nice lady in waiting and be at the party."

"Would you *really*?" exclaimed Mary Jane, in great surprise. She loved the story of Cinderella so dearly that she couldn't imagine anyone not wanting to be a Cinderella when the chance came. "Then I'll be her and you be anything you like."

The janitor appeared just then, waiting to lock up the hall so further discussion had

to be postponed. The players each took a parcel and hurried home to stow the things away safely in the attic before they should have their afternoon outdoor play.

"See you to-morrow morning," they promised each other and then they separated the boys to go to a friend's, Frances and Betty to a dinner party and Alice and Mary Jane to do their regular marketing.

"Do you know," remarked Alice, as they started for the grocery, "I think if we do Cinderella well, we shall need more people than just us six. We ought to have enough to have a real ball."

"How many does it take to make a ball?" questioned Mary Jane.

"Well," said Alice slowly (never having seen a ball it was hard to know just what they were like) "the only picture of Cinderella's ball that I ever saw had twelve people in it I know. At least twelve."

"Then we must have twelve," said Mary Jane.

"But who?" asked Alice.

"Well, there's Emma," said Mary Jane, "and Dick and—"

"Oh, I'll tell you what let's," said Alice. "Let's have a club and do plays or picnics or parties or anything we happen to like."

"Then you could be president, 'cause you know all about clubs," said Mary Jane, who had many a time heard Alice learning her lesson on debating and presiding for the public speaking class.

"Maybe so," replied Alice, "but of course we would have elections often enough for us to take turns at being different officers and on different committees. And we could have a name—"

"What would that be?" asked Mary Jane, so excited already at the thought of a grown-up sort of thing like a club that she dropped the grocery list and had to run back to find it.

"We could have the name a secret,"

planned Alice, "and have initials that no one but ourselves would understand."

"Oh, let's hurry back and have the club now," cried Mary Jane, "do you think Betty will be gone?"

Alice thought Frances and Betty were leaving early for the dinner party so there was no use rushing back to talk with them.

"We'd better get ideas this evening," suggested Alice, "and then just as soon as our work's done in the morning, run over and tell them all about it."

"Will the club be just for acting?" asked Mary Jane.

"No, that wouldn't be so good," replied Alice, thoughtfully. "Let's have it for all sorts of fun—but just for fun, you know, not too serious."

"And what shall we call it?"

"Um-m." Alice puzzled over that question all the time they were walking from the grocery to the meat market till Mary Jane thought she would simply explode if her

sister didn't say *something*. But the expression on Alice's face said plainly as day that as soon as she had something to say she would say it, so her sister kept very still.

"Now really, I think that's as good as anything we could think of," spoke Alice, as they turned into the shop. "'Just for fun.' That tells what it's for and still gives us a chance to do anything we like—that's for fun—and still be a club."

"Is that important enough for a name of a club?" asked Mary Jane, doubtfully. She wanted it to be very imposing, you see.

"Oh, we won't *call* it that," Alice explained. "We'll just know that, ourselves. We'll call it the J. F. F. Club and make folks guess what those letters stand for."

"Really, Alice?" cried Mary Jane, so delightedly that the butcher interrupted to say, "A person can see you are very happy to-day, Miss Merrill. What can I do for you, this afternoon?"

With a start, Mary Jane remembered her

list and her errand. Putting important club business out of her mind for the minute, she read off the list of chops and bacon and cheese and paid attention to see that she got the right change. Then she and Alice, well loaded with parcels, went hurrying home, planning club matters every step of the way.

THE J. F. F. CLUB

BRIGHT and early the next morning Alice and Mary Jane were up and talking about the new club. And just as soon as they could possibly get their work finished, they hurried over to tell Frances and Betty the latest idea.

Of course those two, not knowing anything about the club, were busily thinking up costumes and parts for the Cinderella play.

"Oh, I'm so glad you have come early," Frances exclaimed as, dust cloth in hand, she greeted her friends at the door, "I was just going to tell you that I think we should write parts for this play and have it a regular one."

"But we're going to have a club first," said Mary Jane, nearly dancing in her eagerness to share the news. "And it's go-

ing to act, and give plays and do anything we like to do that's fun."

"It'll be a secret too, the name will, I mean and we'll have lots of surprises and everything."

"Well, what in the world—" began Frances, too surprised to say anything really intelligent.

"Who told you about it?" asked Betty, from half way up the stairs.

"Nobody," replied Mary Jane, proudly. "Alice thought of it all herself."

"I'll tell you how it was," began Alice. Then she suddenly realized that their work wasn't finished so she said, "Here, let me dust while you straighten. Then you can be through and we can talk lots better."

Taking the dust cloth right out of Frances's hand she soon had the room spotless and while she worked, Frances straightened books and chairs, Mary Jane shook up pillows and Betty emptied the waste baskets. Each girl knew just what to do for

many a time they had helped each other in just such a friendly fashion. In a very few minutes the room was in order and Frances said, "There now! That's the last job of the morning. Let's go up to my room and talk."

The four friends hurried upstairs and settled down in Frances's cosy room for the talk they were just bursting to have.

"Now tell us all about the idea and don't you dare skip a single thing," said Frances.

"It began yesterday," said Alice (and to tell the truth, she was much thrilled to see that her idea was making such a stir), "when Mary Jane and I were planning about the new play. We thought it would take more people—you know there is a ball and you can't have that with only six to do it with. And we wondered who we could ask—and—well, all of a sudden, I thought what fun it would be if we had a club—"

"For acting plays?" asked Betty who,

had kept still about as long as she possibly could.

"Yes," replied Alice, "but not *just* for plays. For anything we want to do. Plays or picnics—summer is coming you know and we'll want to have fun on the beach and it's jolly to know of a crowd to get. You people always go away so soon but the others would be here mostly."

"Would we have a name?" asked Betty.

"Oh, *yes*," said Alice, "clubs always have names."

"Now let's see," mused Betty, "What could we have?"

"Oh, you don't have to wonder," said Mary Jane gaily, "Alice has the best name you could find. It's a secret and it isn't."

"I was going to suggest 'The Just For Fun Club,' " said Alice quickly, "but if you can think of a better one, we'd like it I know."

"Tell 'em about the initials and all," in-

sisted Mary Jane, so Alice explained the whole idea.

The girls were just as enthusiastic as Mary Jane had hoped they would be and Frances suggested that they get the other children right away and organize the club that very morning. It was already ten and Ed and John had planned to have a rehearsal at ten-thirty so there was just time to run over and tell Dick and Susan and to phone Dorothy.

"I'd like to have Emma, too," suggested Mary Jane, remembering the little friend that they had rescued from the ice early in the winter.

"I'd love to have her," said Frances, "'cause she's such fun. But if we have anyone that far from this neighborhood, won't we have to have a lot more, too? How big can the club be?"

The girls could see that that was a really important question. At the end of ten minute's talk it was decided that twelve would

be plenty for a start and with the three already chosen and Ted, Don and Katherine all of whom lived within a block, they would have that number, seven girls and five boys, and that would make a fine beginning.

Such a hurrying around as there was then, to tell everyone and ask them to come right over. Ted and Don were not home; Katherine had to take a music lesson at eleven, and Susan had gone to spend the day at her grandmother's so only Dick and Dorothy could come for the first meeting, but the others promised to come over Monday after school to hear all about it and they were much thrilled to be asked into anything so interesting.

By eleven-thirty the club was organized, the name decided and Alice elected president because she thought of having the club. Ed was made treasurer, though there were to be no dues, still you never can tell, the club might have some money some day.

Frances was made secretary. That would be a real job for she would have to keep track of meetings and a record of plays and who were in them and all that. But Frances had a beautiful clean new note book she was just wanting to use and she liked to write things, so the club was certain sure that job would be done right if she had it.

"Now we ought to have badges," said Mary Jane, who intended that this business should be done in style.

"I'll get my piece bag—you wait right here," said Alice. Dashing home, she returned in a jiffy, bringing with her the little linen bag of pieces her mother had recently given her to use any way she might like. In it, she found a bit of bright blue felt—heavy, fine felt, such as is used for making banners.

"Now that's what we want," she said, as she spread it out smoothly. "We can cut it into little flags and put letters on it. Ed,

you make nice letters. Won't you get us a pattern for J. F. F.?"

Ed was pleased to have something to do for sitting on the side lines while girls hunt in piece bags is no particular thrill. He and Dick rummaged in magazines till they found some letters of about the right size and from those as patterns he drew a dozen Js and twenty-four Fs which Dick and John promptly helped him cut out.

With several working, that way, the badges were made very rapidly and by noon each member of the J. F. F. club had proudly pinned to dress or coat lapel a neat triangle of blue felt on which were the yellow letters the members had adopted for their own.

"There are the noon bells!" exclaimed Alice in amazement, as she heard the ringing of the fire station up on Fifty-fifth street. "*Where* has this morning gone?"

"To making a club, Miss Merrill," laughed Ed. "You can't do things and

have time on your hands, too—didn't you ever discover that fact?"

"But we were going to work on the play," said Alice. "That's what the club is for. Not to spend all our time making *it*."

"Well, this isn't all our time, it's just once," laughed Dorothy. "And anyway, this has been loads of fun. I can come over this afternoon, couldn't we do the play thing then?"

John started to say that he was going to play baseball but a clap of thunder made him change his mind. While the club had been organizing, the skies had been busy with affairs of their own and by now, the day that started out so sunnily had changed to a rainy one and an attic engagement was much more fun than anything one might do out of doors. So the club adjourned to meet at one-thirty and the members went scamp-ering home to luncheon.

The scenery for Cinderella proved very easy to do compared with that used for the

first play. There was a fireplace, in the attic room, a crude one to be sure, but that made it all the better. Dorothy had a fairy costume which could be changed a bit for the fairy godmother to wear and Ed made a cage which looked wonderfully lifelike when he put in it six cloth mice from the Five and Ten Cent store. Of course one could not have a real palace, but with a screen put in front of the fireplace, a rug laid over a big chair to make a throne and a couple of lanterns hung from the rafters to suggest a party-like atmosphere, the children felt very satisfied and began the real work of making the play.

Instead of writing out parts and learning them—much too hard work, they all decided, each person said the lines they thought ought to be said and it all turned out wonderfully well. Of course they would have to do it over and over many times before it was perfect enough to give at school, but it was already good enough to

be fun to do and that was a lot for the first day.

"Are you people going to make plays forever?" called a voice from the foot of the stairs.

"Not on your life," called Ed, promptly. "Anyway, not if you mean food, mother."

"I mean taffy," laughed his mother.

"Oh, taffy!" exclaimed the children, delightedly. "We *never* have any taffy at our house," added Dick, wistfully.

"I have eight plates of it here," said Mrs. Holden. "If you know of any eight people who would wash their hands and pull this for me, maybe we could have some to eat."

Immediately there was a scramble and a clatter and the eight children, dropping costumes and scenery on the instant, came tearing down the stairs to the bath rooms. Attics, even in nicely kept houses, aren't always as clean as they might be and the children had done much rummaging before they got their complete costumes, so there had to

be a lot of careful scrubbing before hands could pass inspection. Finally everyone was tidy enough to suit even president Alice and the club rushed down to the kitchen for the taffy pull.

"I think this club is going to be lots of fun," said Dorothy, as she pulled the mass of sticky sweetness from the buttered plate.

"Same here," agreed Ed, "but you girls needn't think I am going to always *meet*! This is only for *sometimes*—so don't you get the club idea too hard."

"We won't, never you mind, Mr. Holden," Frances assured him, "and I'll bet you want to meet just as much as we do, so there."

"Let's not meet *more* than once a week," suggested Alice, wisely, "then we'll not get tired of it."

"Maybe we can oftener in spring vacation," said Dorothy.

"No, not even then," insisted Alice, "'cause there'll be plenty else to do."

Indeed there was, but just what it would be, neither she nor Mary Jane could possibly have guessed. And yet, at that very minute, plans for the spring vacation were being made—only neither girl knew that. *They* were at the Holdens and the *plans* were at home.

AN UNEXPECTED TREAT

WHEN Alice and Mary Jane went home about five o'clock they were eager to tell their mother about the fun of the first club meeting. Seeing it was Saturday their father was at home, too, and he listened interestedly, to what they had to say.

But after the main things were told, Alice suddenly realized that her mother and father looked as though they too had something to tell. You know how people look when they are just bursting to tell some good news but have to wait till someone else has told something first? Well, that's the way those two grown folks looked.

"You've a secret!" Alice accused them, laughingly.

"No, not one," bantered her mother.

"I see it in your eyes," insisted Mary Jane, for now that Alice had pointed it out, she was sure as could be that something was on hand they didn't know about.

"A secret is something that can't be told," Mrs. Merrill reminded them.

"This *can* be told but hasn't been, yet," said Alice after a bit of hard thinking.

"You've hit it," laughed her father, "and you deserve to be told for such good guessing," he added.

"But first lay off your sweaters and wash up for dinner," said Mrs. Merrill, and if there was a bit of a twinkle in her eyes, the girls didn't stop to find what it meant for they well knew that the quicker they themselves were ready for the news, the quicker it would be told them.

"You wash first and I'll put the sweaters away," suggested Mary Jane.

With the sweaters over her arm, she hurried into their room and there, standing straight and imposing on her dresser, was a



There was a letter in grandmother's own handwriting.

letter with a big, important looking special delivery stamp on it—all so mussed up and dirty that it looked as though it had been in an awful rush to get there.

“Miss Alice Merrill,

“Miss Mary Jane Merrill,” it said, just that way and plain as day.

“Alice! Alice!” called Mary Jane, “come quickly! We’ve a letter!”

Alice came running, towel in hand and with a hasty wiping of fingers, she slit the envelope open and there was letter in grandmother’s own handwriting. It wasn’t very long. Alice laid it flat on the dresser so they could read it together.

“My darling girls (it began) : It has been such a long time since I have seen you or since you have been here to visit. A letter from your mother says your spring vacation comes the first week of May this year. That is usually a beautiful time on the farm. Won’t you please come and visit your grandfather and me for that week? We

want you so much. Lovingly, Grandmother Hodges."

Alice stared at Mary Jane and Mary Jane stared back. A whole week at grandmother Hodges! What fun that would be! Was this the news? Did their mother know too? Would she let them go?

They went dashing out to the living room to find the answer to all these questions.

The girls and boys who have begun reading this story of Mary Jane Merrill since the first book will want to know something about these nice grandparents—the rest of you remember all about them. Grandfather and grandmother Hodges live in the country on a lovely farm that has an orchard, a barn, a chicken yard, a strawberry patch, a garden and a big porch—all the lovely things that a farm ought to have if little girls from the city are to enjoy it as Alice and Mary Jane did this one. But for a long time grandmother Hodges had not been very strong. So this was the first time

since—dear me, but it was a long time!—since the summer Mary Jane was five, that the two girls, all by themselves, had been there for a regular visit. Visits of a day or two or with mother and father didn't count like the other sort did, for on short visits one never had time to hunt eggs and get acquainted with the barnyard or do a lot of the things girls love to do. So no wonder the prospect of a real visit again, thrilled the little city girls.

“Yes, this is the news I had for you,” laughed their mother when they began piling questions at her. “Mother wrote a letter to me, too, and as I was at home when it came, I've had the good news more than an hour. I'd have called you, but I knew you were having such a good time and there was no rush about answering mother so we'd just wait till you came home.”

“May we answer her, ‘yes, we'll come’?” asked Mary Jane, eagerly.

“Do you want to go?” teased her mother.

"Do we *want* to!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "now, *mother!*"

"But how about the new club?" asked Mr. Merrill. "Can you leave that?"

"Now Daddah, you're teasing," replied Alice. "And anyway, we decided not to have but one meeting a week so we would only miss one. We can elect a vice-president to tend to things while I am gone."

"Dear me, but you are getting smart," laughed her father. "This debating society or whatever you call it over at school is certainly teaching you how to manage club business. Well, I'm for it, sister. You learn all you can."

Alice laughed, but she was proud of his praise all the same and slipped over to give him a hug and a kiss.

"Then it's settled? We may go?" asked Mary Jane, who wanted to make sure she understood.

"We'd love to have you go," Mrs. Merrill assured her, "if you and Alice would like to

spend your precious week that way. After dinner you may write a note to grandmother so she surely gets it Monday morning. I think it will do her good to have you and I know I can count on you both helping her so the extra work of feeding two hungry girlies will not be too much for her."

"You know we will, mother," said Alice, heartily.

"We'll cook for her, too, and surprise her," promised Mary Jane, eagerly. "She thinks we are just little girl visitors, but we'll show her we are really truly cooks."

Dinner time that evening was a very lively meal. The girls had to go back to their story of the club and the play and the taffy pulling and make sure there was nothing left out that should have been told. And then, on top of that, someone kept saying something, every sentence or two, about the trip to the country; the changes that had taken place on the farm since the girls had

been there and the fun they would be sure to have on a visit.

Mrs. Merrill usually took a night train, when she went home, but it arrived so early in the morning that she was bothered lest it hurry the girls too much to dress and be ready to get off during the brief stop the train made.

"Isn't there any other train?" asked Alice.

"Yes, there's a fine one that leaves here at ten and gets there at three—a faster train than the night one, you see," answered her father.

"Oh, let's take that," cried Mary Jane. "I love to sleep on the train, but we haven't eaten on a diner for ever so long and we could have lunch—there *is* a diner, isn't there, Daddah?" she asked, anxiously.

"To be sure," her father replied, "and an unusually good one it is, too. I really think that is the best plan. You can go Saturday morning and grandfather can meet you at three much easier than early in the morning.

Then maybe—but we'd better not plan—”

“Yes we had,” insisted Mary Jane, “you must tell the whole business.”

“I was just thinking that maybe by the next week, your mother and I could drive down for you and we'd all come home together.”

“Goody! Goody! Goody!” cried the little girl happily, “that's the best plan yet. Then everything's settled and we'll write to grandmother.”

“When is it we go?” asked Alice.

“Why, spring vacation,” replied Mary Jane.

“But when's that?”

There was a scurry to look at the calendar and Alice discovered that the first week of May was still a fortnight off—plenty of time to finish up the acting of the Cinderella play, make their traveling frocks and be all ready for the vacation when it arrived.

After dinner there was much scratching of pens while nice long letters were written

to grandmother, thanking her for her beautiful invitation and assuring her that two granddaughters would arrive on the afternoon of the first Saturday in May.

That done, these same two girls, quite tired from an unusually busy and exciting day, turned in early to bed and if their dreams were a bit of a jumble of taffy and farms and fairy godmothers—well, you wouldn't be so very surprised, would you?

On Monday morning, Miss Endicott announced that there was to be a contest in the composition class and that it would end the last day before vacation. Every person in the room was to write a story about what they expected to do during spring vacation. The stories were to be turned in first thing in the morning on the Friday before vacation. Miss Endicott planned to look them over during the noon recess and the best ten were to be read to the whole room in the afternoon.

"Is there a prize?" asked Betty, eagerly holding up her hand for attention.

"Not really a *prize*," answered Miss Endicott, "that is, not a *thing* that you can look at or take home. There is an honor. And for my part, I'd rather have an honor than a regular prize, wouldn't you?"

"What *is* the honor?" questioned Dick. He didn't intend to give his opinion till he had all the facts.

"The person whose story is voted the best is to go to Miss Johnson's room and read the story for afternoon exercises," said Miss Endicott, impressively.

The children stared. That indeed would be an honor for Miss Johnson's was the graduating class and everyone knew perfectly well that they had the best exercises in the building and lots of visitors and all that. To read before them all—a bit scary to be sure. But wouldn't it be fun!

Mary Jane resolved to get that prize if she possibly could. Think how thrilled

Alice would be to have her little sister come and read before Alice's own room! It would be almost as good as catching up with her in grades. Mary Jane knew, too, that her mother and father would be very pleased to have her get an honor for her good writing and grandmother and grandfather would be pleased and—well, there was no use talking or thinking about anything else, she had to get that prize. Her story must be the very best.

Miss Endicott continued talking.

"You people know I don't like you to do home work. You should be out of doors in the afternoon and to bed early in the evening. Anyway, if you pay attention, you can get your lessons in the time you have at school. But this story is different. It is extra and must be done at home. Write in ink, on one side of the paper. Do not have it more than three pages long—two will be quite all right if that is all you have to say. And it must be true. By that I mean, it

mustn't be a made up plan, it must be about what you really truly expect to do during the spring vacation. Now do your best for we want to show what good writers we have by receiving so many fine stories, neatly and beautifully written, that we can hardly decide which one is the best. That will make it exciting and lots of fun. Are there any questions?"

The children thought a minute. No, Miss Endicott had said so much and told it all so plainly that there wasn't anything one needed to ask. After a pause to give them time to be sure, she said, "Very well, then, we will go on with our work. Mary Jane, you may pass the blanks for spelling."

MARY JANE WRITES A STORY

ALL that morning, between times of doing spelling and numbers and reading and such, Mary Jane kept asking herself, "What shall I write? What shall I write? What shall I write that is the very best anyone can write?"

And every time, she answered herself, "I don't know! I don't know! I don't know!"

Going home at noon, she walked alone. Alice's room was a little late getting out and Betty had an errand to do on another street. So Mary Jane thrust her hands deep into her sweater pockets and said, "I don't know!" so many times! Till finally she had to laugh at herself for it!

"Aren't I a silly little girl?" she said—to herself of course. "I'm going on a lovely visit in the country and I'm the only little

girl in our room that is. At least, anyway, I think I'm the only one. Country is nice to write about. It ought to be easy.

"I know," and suddenly she had her idea. "Alice always makes lists. I'll make me a list. I'll write down all the things I can remember doing at grandmother's house when we were there before. Then I'll see how many of them I can do in spring time and those are the ones I will put in my story."

Out from her pockets came her hands and down the street Mary Jane ran as fast as ever she could toward home so the list could be begun.

While she ate her luncheon, the paper and pencil was right before her and she wrote, "picked flowers, played in attic on rainy day, Fourth of July picnic, gathered strawberries, hunted eggs, fed the chickens, went driving with grandfather," and everything else she could think of.

There wasn't time then to mark off the things that couldn't be done in spring time—

Mary Jane could see there were a good many such, for strawberries don't ripen till June and Fourth of July doesn't come till July.

But the first thing after the dinner work was finished, she pulled out the list and with her father's advice to help her on a few of which she was not sure, she finished it till nothing but springtime pleasures were on it, from top to bottom.

"That certainly ought to make a good story," remarked Mr. Merrill, as he read it over and he handed it back to Mary Jane. "There are many jolly things there that I would like to do, I know that."

Mary Jane read the list over and more, even, than before, she felt she could hardly wait the ten days till vacation began and she would go to see her grandmother.

"Maybe the time won't be so long if you start writing your story now," suggested Mrs. Merrill who saw that there was a little more than a half an hour till bed time.

"I'll do it," said Mary Jane, happily. So hunting out her paper and pencil, she set to work.

Of course the story wasn't finished in one evening. It had to be corrected and some of the words had to be looked up in the dictionary to see that they were spelled right. Mary Jane found it a terrible job to locate, in the dictionary, words she didn't know how to spell. How *is* a person to discover them? She worked nearly an hour on that pesky word "surround" (she wanted to tell how there were trees and shrubs all around the house) and having started, she hated to give up for she knew the word was in the dictionary somewhere. Who ever would have supposed it began with an S? Mary Jane had been certain sure it began with a C! But it didn't.

Finally she asked her mother would she please read the story over and tell her if every word was right.

"Miss Endicott said we should not get

help but that our mothers might read our stories. Don't tell me *what* is wrong, if you find a mistake, mother. Just tell me if anything *is* and I'll hunt until I find it."

But though Mrs. Merrill read slowly and carefully, not a mistake did she find. That made Mary Jane very proud and pleased and in the gayest of spirits, she selected a fresh piece of paper and copied the story in her best handwriting.

"There now," she said, as she examined the two and a half neat pages, "that's the best I know how to do. If anyone has a better story and a neater paper,—well, they have a pretty nice one and they ought to get the prize. I'm sure of that."

But where should she keep the story all the days till the Friday morning of next week when it was to be turned in? That was a puzzle. She didn't want to put it in her drawer—it might get mussy even in the straightest drawer. The desk was too much used by all four of them—it didn't seem a

good place to keep such big sheets as the school-size papers were. The sideboard—no. The linen closet—no. The trunk room—the very idea! of course not!

“Oh, I know!” laughed Mary Jane and off she dashed to tuck it away in what seemed the safest place imaginable and *most* suitable, too.

“I’ll not tell a soul and then a week from Thursday evening, I’ll get it out and mother’ll say, ‘Why Mary Jane! How tidily you have kept that paper!’ ”

So she put it there; shut the door and then proceeded to forget all about it.

There was a great deal to do in the few days left before vacation. To be sure, one does not need new clothing to go visiting in the country. But old dresses had to be let down and Mrs. Merrill had decided to make new frocks for traveling as every day school dresses were getting quite winter worn and Sunday best was hardly suited for train wear. Mary Jane’s new one was brown

crepe with gold color buttons while Alice's was navy blue with steel gray.

Hats that are of felt and are nearly worn out from winter storms hardly go with new dresses, so new ones had to be hunted and as Mrs. Merrill couldn't find any in the neighborhood shops, she took the girls down town to make the purchase.

Alice and Mary Jane loved that even though they had to miss the Saturday morning meeting of the J. F. F. club on account of the trip. Mr. Merrill met them for luncheon at one of the great stores and they had a real party—and found hats, too. A brown straw with gold color ribbons for Mary Jane and a blue straw with a steel buckle and blue ribbon band for Alice. So all together, the trip was most successful.

"A week from right now we will be at grandmother's," remarked Alice, as they slipped their key into the door of the apartment between three and four that afternoon.

"A whole week!" exclaimed Mary Jane, "why it *is*! Whatever'll we do all that time?"

Her question was answered sooner than Alice could reply for as they pushed the door open they spied a bit of folded paper tucked under the sill. Undoing it, Alice read, "Come over and see us just as soon as you get home. Important. F."

"May we go, or do you need us, mother?" asked Alice.

"Run along, darlings," said Mrs. Merrill. "Perhaps, though you will want to slip into other dresses. Maybe you will be up to some sort of fun and it's such a bore to have to be bothered with being careful of clothes."

The girls thought that a fine idea, so as speedily as possible, they slipped into every day frocks and hurried over to the Holden house.

"You may stay till quarter before six, if you like," Mrs. Merrill, called after them for she thought that after so many hours of

being well behaved ladies up town, a little time for careless play would seem very jolly.

It was a good thing she said that, for even though there was no careless play done, there was plenty else and every minute was needed.

"What's happened?" Alice called to Frances as the two Merrills ran up the steps.

"Nothing's happened—that is, nothing bad. But more fun—Come in quickly while I tell you. Miss Johnson phoned to me about an hour ago. There's a meeting or a convention—what's the difference do you know? Well, anyway, I guess it's a meeting. Of people who are studying about plays. And she told them about our Hansel and Gretchel that we did all by ourselves. And they want to see it. Now isn't that wonderful?"

"But they can't. They weren't here in time," said Mary Jane, who, for the life of her, couldn't see anything so very wonderful in all that.

"No, but what's to keep us from doing it again? Tell me that!" replied Frances.

Mary Jane stared. Why nothing would keep them—nothing she could think of. But Frances was talking.

"So she told them, 'yes, she was sure we would love doing it again for the meeting.' And they meet Monday at the University. We will go over with Miss Johnson and one of the ladies from the meeting. And then we act it for them."

"But we have to have our scenery," said Alice.

"Of course," agreed Frances. "We take it along. Start early enough to put it up after we get there. Mother is so pleased to think that we did something Miss Johnson thinks is worth while and your mother will be too, I am sure of that."

So was Alice.

"But what do we do now?" she asked.

"Well, Betty and I went up stairs right after Miss Johnson phoned," continued

Frances. "We thought we would get out all the things and have them ready for Monday morning. And do you know, one side of the candy house got wet and the paint ran and we'll have to do a whole house over again."

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Mary Jane. "That was such a fine one."

"The new one will be, too," Frances assured her. "Betty and I have the new paper ready and we were just about to start. So hurry up and we'll have it done before dinner—that's all the time there is."

The four girls hurried up stairs, mixed their paints, tacked up the paper and set to work. Of course this time they had the other one for a pattern and although the paint had run so it wouldn't be nice to use in a play, still, there was enough left to show them where to paint what, and to help with the planning of a pattern. There wasn't much talk except, "Have you some more water?" and "Do you think this is red

enough?" and such till, when the clock in the hall struck five, the whole thing was done.

But that was not all. The costumes must be pressed—they had been put away in a trunk and now must be made to look their best; the fire screens must be brushed off and, finally, everything must be packed in baskets. Monday morning is always such a rush that the girls didn't dare leave one single job till then.

Well, there isn't time in a book to tell everything that happens. But you may be sure that the play went off better than ever before and that all the people at the meeting were greatly pleased. They not only said so, but they acted it very plainly. The players and their teacher went back to school much thrilled with their work and the praise it had had.

After that the week fairly flew by till first thing Mary Jane knew it was Friday morning, the last day before vacation.

As she kissed her mother good-by that morning, Mrs. Merrill said, "It seems to me you were to do something or take something this morning, dear. Am I mistaken? It just runs in my mind that way."

"Do something? Take something?" asked Alice. "I don't think I was to."

"Do something?" asked Mary Jane, half remembering. "Take something? Oh, I know! My story about vacation! How could I ever forget that when I worked so hard only last week? It has to be given to Miss Endicott this morning. Thank you so much, mother, for remembering."

She went back into her room to get the paper—but it wasn't there. Nor was it on the desk; nor in the buffet nor in the linen closet—Mary Jane hunted frantically in all the likely places with her mother and Alice following after her and trying their best to think where the precious paper might have been put. But it wasn't to be found. Eight thirty arrived; eight thirty-five; eight thirty-

eight and the girls would have to run all the way if they were to get to school in time for first bell. Mary Jane hadn't yet the slightest idea where that paper had been put. She remembered putting it some place and being very pleased with her selection. But where?

First thing after school began, Miss Endicott collected the story papers and Mary Jane had to bite her lips hard to keep from being a baby and crying. Her paper, the story that she was sure would have won the first place, wasn't in the pile on her teacher's desk. Where could it be?

SO NEAR—AND YET SO FAR

MARY JANE lived most of that morning looking through a blur of tears. She was too proud to let them fall, but she couldn't help them coming and she could hardly do her lessons, it was so hard to see through them.

When she got home at noon, it was pleasant to hear her mother's cheerful voice saying, "Now dear, wouldn't you like to do a little of your packing this noon?"

As for Mrs. Merrill, she had spent hours that morning, hunting the missing papers. She was sure they must be quite close—somewhere. Nothing like that would have been thrown out, she was sure. And yet, though she hunted and hunted, not a sign of the papers did she find. So she planned that the best thing she could do was to have a very nice luncheon ready and to get her little

daughter started with packing by way of diverting her mind from what she knew was a very keen disappointment. Above all, she wouldn't speak of the story.

"Oh, will we have time to pack?" asked Alice eagerly, while Mary Jane's little face showed the first flicker of a smile since morning.

"Not really time to do everything, of course," said Mrs. Merrill, "you can finish this evening. But I thought it would be nice to get out the bags and dust them off and spread them open on the beds. Then this afternoon, as I think of things you will need, I'll lay them in so they will not be forgotten.

"You know where your bags are, get them out and dust them before you wash your hands. I'll pour the cocoa and we'll sit down to luncheon in four minutes."

That seemed a very pleasant job. The girls ran to the hall closet where, on the lower shelf a suit case and a small bag were always kept. Mary Jane spread a fresh

newspaper on her bed and fetched a clean dust cloth, while Alice got the bags and opened them out on the paper.

Hardly was the suit case open before Mary Jane shrieked at the top of her voice, "I've got it! I've got it! Where's my sweater? If I run, maybe I'll be in time!"

"Mother! Come quickly! Something's happened to Mary Jane!" shouted Alice, but Mrs. Merrill had also heard the strange tone of Mary Jane's voice and the excited thrill and had hurried to see what had happened.

It was a good thing she hurried for otherwise she might not have seen Mary Jane. That little girl grabbed her sweater and then without another word except the excited, "I've got it! I've got it!" that she shouted over and over, she took the spotless sheets on which her story was written from the big pocket of the suit case and ran down the stairs and off to school.

Alice felt positively weak she was that amazed.



Mary Jane shrieked at the top of her voice, "I've got it!
I've got it!"

Evidently Mary Jane had put the story there in the top of the suit case—and safe enough a place it was, at that. Only, she had forgotten all about it—and no wonder either for certainly a suit case that was only used a couple of times a year did not seem a likely place to think of for keeping home work.

Mary Jane ran every step of the way back to school. She climbed the stairs as fast as she could—it wasn't very fast, alas, for she had mighty little breath left by then, you may be sure. She dashed into her room just as Miss Endicott was putting away her lunch box and making ready to go over the stories.

"Am I in time?" gasped Mary Jane.

"In time?" asked the amazed teacher. "I should say you are! Why there's nearly an hour till afternoon school begins. Whatever can you be thinking of, child?"

"My story," explained Mary Jane, "I found it." She couldn't say more and Miss Endicott was startled to see how breathless and pale she looked. Of course she didn't

know that the little girl had run so far and so fast, but she did know she must rest a minute.

"You sit right down in this chair, Mary Jane," she said, firmly, "and get your breath. Then tell me what it is you are talking about. Now take five long, even breaths—with your mouth closed, dear."

Mary Jane sat down in the nearest chair and took the five deep breaths as she was told—and promptly felt much better. And as soon as Miss Endicott would let her, she told all about writing the story so many days ago, about trying her best to think of a safe place to keep it neat and clean till this very day; about putting it in the suit case which she was *sure* she would remember as the suit case was to be used on the very trip the story was about.

"It's a good thing you found it just when you did," said Miss Endicott, gaily, "for you are just in time. Now you skip home and eat a nice luncheon and I'll put your

paper in the middle of the pile just where it would have been laid if you had had it this morning. Then this afternoon, when you come back—we shall see what we shall see.”

Mary Jane felt very light hearted and happy as she walked back home. She would have liked to go very, very slowly for suddenly she noticed that the sun was shining and that it was a beautiful day—evidently it had been a beautiful day all the day, only Mary Jane had been so bothered about the missing story, in the morning, that she hadn't even noticed the glorious weather. But she could not take *too* long as she was hungry.

Alice had waited luncheon for her so they had a very happy time together and Mary Jane told them how nice Miss Endicott had been and that she was allowing the story to be in the contest even though it was a bit late arriving.

When the children marched into the room for afternoon school they noticed the names

of ten children written on the front black board. Mary Jane's and Betty's were there—all in alphabetical order, of course so no one could tell which Miss Endicott thought should be at the top.

Very quickly the room settled to quiet for the children wanted to hear what their teacher had to say about that list of names.

"I have read all your stories about the vacation-to-be," she said. "Some of them are very, very good and some are carelessly done. At some other time I want to talk with you about the place where you write at home. Maybe you haven't good light or a good desk for some of the papers, I regret to say, are not as neat as they might be. Others are exceedingly good.

"The ten children whose names are on the board may come up and get their papers from my desk. These are the best—all things such as ideas, writing, spelling and everything considered. You may sit here on the front seats and we will read them

right away. Listen closely, now, for at the end of the reading you are all to vote which is best.”

There was a stir of excitement in the room as the children, six girls and four boys got their papers, seated themselves in front and began the reading in the order their names were written. It was very hard to tell which one was best. Dick was going on a trip to New York with his father. His story was very real sounding as far as the getting off from Chicago was concerned. But as he had never been to New York, he didn't try to tell anything he was planning to do while there. Ellen was expecting to learn to sew—to make her first dress, a pink gingham and she wrote a very nice paper about that. Betty was going to the lake with her father to open their summer home. And so it went, some of the children were staying at home, some going away, but all had nice plans of some sort, and wrote about them well, so there was much shuffling of feet and fidgeting

while the children made up their minds.

When the vote was finally counted, several children got two or three each, Ellen got five, Dick seven, Betty eleven and Mary Jane sixteen—she had won the contest.

Of course she was proud—who wouldn't be. But mainly she thought, "How pleased Alice will be when she sees me come in to read my story and everybody'll know that her sister won!"

Just before recess, Miss Endicott took her down to Miss Johnson's room and stayed there with her while she read. Betty, who sat in Miss Endicott's chair while they were gone was quite imposing and would look after the class very well while they studied the reading lesson they were to have right after recess.

Mary Jane felt funny and shaky in her knees when she began to read but soon that went away and she was just as steady and read so well, it almost seemed as though reading a prize story to the graduating class

wasn't anything at all—but it was all the same.

“Grandmother'll be pleased as Punch,” said Alice, when they got home at four o'clock. “Mary Jane just read beautifully and she must take the story with us so grandmother can hear it.”

So the papers were put back in the pocket of the suit case and Mary Jane promised never again to forget where she put anything.

There was considerable flurry in the Merrill household after that. No packing at all had been done at noon time, because of the excitement about the story. And though Mrs. Merrill had put a few odds and ends beside the bags, during the afternoon, nothing much had been done as she had had other duties. The two girls put on aprons and went to work washing rubbers and hair brushes, counting out handkerchiefs and stockings and putting underclothing in neat little piles on the bed.

"Seems as though there are so many kinds of things to take," said Alice, as she looked over what she had been gathering together. "And yet we are only staying a week. How are we to know that we have everything when we pack to come back home?"

"We'll just take every little-girl-thing we see," laughed Mary Jane, "'cause grandmother's things are all lady things."

"Yes," agreed Alice, "but you know how we get things all over the house. How'll we know we have everything even then?"

Mrs. Merrill studied the question a minute and then she said, "I have a suggestion, Alice. Get a pencil and note book or paper and as we pack, write down everything you put in. Then pack that list in with Mary Jane's story and when you make ready to come home, you will have an accurate list of everything you should bring."

Alice thought that a fine idea, especially as she adored making lists. She found two

sheets of stout paper, one for the suit case and one for the little bag and on these the name of every article packed was written. When the bags were finished—all but brushes and night things and those would be put in the last minute in the morning—she tucked the lists in the big pocket—and there they would be ready for the return trip. It seemed a most excellent idea.

By the time all that was done, the afternoon was about gone. Alice wanted to make some candy to take her grandmother and Mary Jane had planned a surprise that she was to do with her own money. Grandmother Hodges was very, very fond of strawberries. But of course the berries in their own beautiful patch would not be ripe for many weeks yet and in the country the market did not carry the Florida berries that were so plentiful in Chicago. So Mary Jane had planned to buy a box of the freshest ones she could find and take them with her as a surprise for her grandmother.

Luckily the fruit was more than usually fine that day and Mary Jane got luscious big berries which the grocery man wrapped with great pains and tied for carrying. So by dinner time, everything was in readiness for the trip.

A SLIDE IN MID-AIR

THERE'S my grandmother!"

Mary Jane called gaily to the porter who, with their bags piled in front of him, stood in the vestibule of the train that had so rapidly carried Alice and Mary Jane to the little village near which grandfather and grandmother Hodges lived.

The porter busily rubbed the handrail to shining brightness; the brakes on the great train creaked and groaned and the train came to a stop. Almost before the girls could tell what was happening, their bags were set off, they were helped down the steps of the car, the signal was given and the train moved off leaving them in the warm embrace of their devoted grandparents.

"It surely does seem good to have a girl for each of us, doesn't it, mother?" said grandfather happily, as he gave Mary Jane

a big hug and looked over to signal Alice that her turn was coming.

"Good! Well I just guess!" cried grandmother, so contentedly that both girls could tell how glad she was to see them and how she had looked forward to their visit.

"But have you had your dinner?" asked grandfather, anxiously.

"Do we look starved?" asked Alice.

"Can't say that you do," laughed grandfather, as he smiled at her rosy cheeks. "Too bad you can't eat any of grandmother's cookies though," he added.

"Who said we couldn't?" demanded Mary Jane. "You said dinner and we had our luncheon-dinner on the train. But cookies—U-um—have you *plenty*, grandmother?"

Grandmother assured them that she had, so talking gaily, they walked over to the little car where grandfather tucked them in snugly for the wind was a bit chill even though the sun shone brightly.

"We have warmer weather promised for to-morrow," remarked grandfather as he started the car, "and if it comes, we'll have an orchard of blossoms for you. They've been holding off for this very day."

"*Really?* I never saw the orchard bloom before," said Mary Jane, eagerly.

"We'll find lots of things that will be new," promised grandmother, "for you've always been here in the summer and spring is different."

Indeed, Mary Jane thought it surely was. She remembered the house set in a thick grove of trees, so thick it could hardly be seen from the road. Instead, the trees were a delicate green and not nearly as heavy with foliage as in summer. The house gleamed white between the dainty green and the lilac bushes in the hedge by the road had great clusters of buds at the tops. The orchard that they passed just before coming to the house was pink—the flowers were out much farther than even that very morning

when she left for the train, grandmother said, and oh, what a lovely fragrance came from it as the wind blew over the blooming trees.

"Why, you've painted the house!" exclaimed Alice as the car stopped at the side door and. Alice observed the fresh whiteness of the house and the scaffold that still hung on the side next the driveway.

"Yes, we wanted to look nice for a couple of worthless young ladies who were coming to visit us," laughed grandfather. "But those men promised to be all finished before noon and now they've gone off and left their stuff here over Sunday."

"And I perfectly well know they haven't an hour's more work and could just as well clear up to-day," grumbled grandmother, who loved to have everything spick and span and tidy when visitors came.

"Never you mind," laughed Alice. "We haven't had a scaffolding around for so long, I like to see one."

“And you haven’t any fresh paint in the cookie jar, have you grandmother?” questioned Mary Jane.

That made grandmother forget all about the painters and very gaily she led the girls into the house while grandfather put the car away.

Old Bob, Mary Jane’s good collie friend on her last long visit in the country, dashed bounding up to see her. Surely he couldn’t remember—but he seemed to. Anyway, he felt awfully good friends for he nearly wagged his tail off and jumped up and down so gaily Mary Jane laughed and laughed at the sight.

“You’re such big girls now that I thought I’d let you each have a room of your own,” said grandmother, as she led the way upstairs. “So Alice has the blue room here and Mary Jane, you are to have the pink room—see it’s right next door so you won’t be lonesome. Do you like that? Or would you rather be together?”

"Aren't you darling!" exclaimed Alice, while Mary Jane gave one peek at the rosy prettiness of hers and then gave her grandmother a hug and kiss of joy.

"We love rooming together at home," Alice explained, "but it's such fun to be different on a visit."

"We can wave out our windows," said Mary Jane, who was making a hasty tour of exploration. "Who-oo! I'm here!"

Alice ran to her window and "who-oo"-ed back.

"There's almost a porch," she added, making a discovery in her turn. "Too bad the men didn't leave their scaffold a little higher then we could walk from your room to mine on the outside. Maybe we can anyway."

Grandmother Hodges didn't hear, for after seeing the girls were pleased with their rooms, she had hurried downstairs to make tea.

The girls unpacked their bags, hung their

frocks on the hangers they found in the closets and put other belongings in the drawers. Then, after washing and making themselves tidy, they went downstairs.

Of course you do not suppose that all this time Mary Jane had forgotten her prize story? To be sure she hadn't. She unpacked it first thing and laid it on the little white desk in her room. Then, when she went downstairs, she took it along and read it aloud while they waited for the tea to get cool enough to drink.

Grandmother and grandfather were just as proud as she hoped they would be and grandfather declared that he would rather Mary Jane win an honor like that than anything else she could win—he really did. Mary Jane was that *pleased*!

Both girls were pretty tired—all the excitement of Friday with the getting off and the trip by themselves on the train had been fun, to be sure, but pretty thrilling. By the

time they had inspected the new chickens, the two new calves, the garden that was just getting interesting and grandmother had enjoyed her strawberries and grandfather had eaten some of Alice's candy and they had all had supper—well, those two little girls were ready for bed. Grandmother gave them each a candle—to be sure there was electricity in the house, but grandmother still liked the candles in the bedrooms at night—and they said goodnight and went to bed. Alice didn't even say, "I can stay up an hour longer than Mary Jane, 'cause I'm older." She was as glad to get into her nice soft bed as any little sister could be.

The first sound that Mary Jane heard the next morning was her own name called softly.

"Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Aren't you ever going to wake up?"

She turned over and stretched gently, trying her best to get her eyes open.

“Mary Jane! Mary Jane! Look where I am!”

Mary Jane sat straight up in bed at that and looked around her pretty room. Alice wasn't at the door; she wasn't at the dresser; she wasn't—but she *was* at the window, standing, or so it appeared, on nothing at all outside the window!

“You'll fall!” shouted Mary Jane, out of her bed and across the room in a jiffy. “Don't you know you can't stand on air?”

“Air, fiddlesticks!” laughed Alice. “Aren't you enough awake to remember the scaffold, honey? I climbed out on it at my window and here I am at yours. And I'm going on to wake grandpa—I guess that will surprise him pretty much.”

“Oh it will, will it,” laughed a voice from the ground below. “Well, I guess it will surprise somebody else to know that her grandfather is up and has the chickens fed and the chores done without any help from old lazybones from the city.”

"Have you really, grandpa!" exclaimed Alice in dismay, "and I thought I was so early!"

"Well," said grandfather, hesitating laughingly, "maybe if you really want a job, I could find one. Only be careful how you get back in from that perch you are on, young lady."

"That's easy as pie," said Alice, grandly, "I just climb in. Do you want to try it before I go in, Mary Jane?"

"Indeed, I don't," replied Mary Jane. "I'd hate it. I'm going down to help grandmother just as soon as I'm dressed." She hurried off to the bath room to take her tub and grandfather went into the shed around back of the house.

Alice waited a minute before going in to her room. The sunshine was so fine and the air fairly smelled good. And one felt so awfully much out of doors, there on the side of the house away from earth or floors. She spied the ropes, hanging at her side and,

seeing them twisted, apparently carelessly, she unwound them, giving a jerk or two to get them straight. How it ever happened she had no idea, and of course, no one else was there to see. But suddenly one end of the scaffold dropped down a foot or two and Alice, clutching madly at a rope, slid down, down till her feet hung through the iron ends, just above the dining room window.

There she hung, it didn't drop any farther and certainly she couldn't climb back up the steep slope that the scaffold had now become. She called and called, but Mary Jane splashing water in the bath room, couldn't possibly hear and grandfather had gone from the shed, out to the barn on the other side of the house.

"I guess I'll hang here all day," sighed Alice, tired of calling. But just then good old Bob came rambling around the house and of course he heard her in a minute. Dashing first to the kitchen door and then to the barn he barked and barked and

barked running all the while like a mad creature between the house, the barn and the wall where Alice hung suspended in mid-air.

At last grandfather got the idea that something was up. And when he came to see and found his little granddaughter in such a predicament—well—rescue work began pretty quickly, you may be sure.

He got a ladder from the barn, leaned it against the side of the house, climbed and helped Alice down himself and so quickly that she didn't have time to worry very long.

"Well, I guess scaffolds aren't so good for little girls after all, are they?" he said, as he brushed her off and made sure she wasn't hurt.

"I guess I've tried them all I mean to," replied Alice, a trifle shakily, but much amused now that she was safely on the ground again. "They're too skiddy to be comfortable. I guess I'll stay on the ground the rest of the day."

“Good enough,” approved grandfather. “Now what do you say that we tell them what they’ve missed seeing and then have breakfast. Pretty good idea?” And slipping Alice’s arm through his, they went in at the back door.

GRANDMOTHER'S ATTIC

WHEN Mary Jane and Alice (to say nothing of grandfather Hodges himself) had eaten all the good waffles and syrup they could and had had second helpings of omelet and broiled ham, grandmother said, "Now father, don't you think we had better ask these girls what they want to do most? It isn't as though they had all summer for fun. They have only a week. And we want to be sure they do all the things they want."

"Let's see," said grandfather, thoughtfully, "what did that prize story say? Driving, feeding chickens, picnics, play in the attic, sliding down the loft—have I left anything out?"

Mary Jane giggled. Grandfather was such a tease! He knew well enough that he had left out the most important part—or

anyway *one* of the most important—helping grandmother cook. Above everything else, Mary Jane counted on showing her grandmother what a fine cook she had learned to be. Grandmother was such fun to be with anyway—even more fun than picnics because she could tell such interesting stories.

“That story didn’t say anything about cooking in grandmother’s kitchen, did it?” asked Mary Jane, resolved to do a bit of teasing herself.

“Come to think of it, now, I guess it did,” said grandfather, seriously. “I guess I’ll have to get that paper out and read it over again. Must not forget anything it said.”

“Now father, you stop your joking and let me talk,” said grandmother, with a smile. “I’m going to tell these girls some of the things we’ve planned and then they can say whether that’s what they want to do or something different.”

“To-day, we will go to church, and then

everybody can help get dinner—it won't take long for the pantry is full of surprises. This afternoon some friends will come in to visit and maybe stay for tea. You'll like that because there will be some nice girls about your age. To-morrow we'll go for a picnic down by the brook—"

"Isn't there any washing?" asked Alice, in surprise. "I thought you *always* washed on Monday."

"Well, I usually do," admitted grandmother, "but this time—"

"But this time you thought you would wait till your two lazy granddaughters had gone back home and then you'd make up back work."

"Well, you see," began grandmother, but her face showed plainly enough that Alice had guessed correctly.

"I see that you don't know how grown-up we are," said Alice, firmly. "We can wash as well as you can—no, I expect that isn't true because we never did it. But we can

learn, you just see, grandmother dear. We'll help you loads and then after the work is done, we'll have the picnic."

"Very well," said grandmother continuing, but the girls could see by her shining eyes that she was pleased as Punch that they wanted to help her. "Tuesday we'll spade and plant your garden. Grandfather does it for you every year but this time you can plan it yourselves and that will make it much better.

"Wednesday we'll drive to the lake; Thursday—"

"But isn't it ever going to rain?" asked Mary Jane, in such disappointment that grandmother couldn't help but laugh.

"Did you ever see a week in May without rain?" she asked. "But we hope for good weather so you can be out of doors all the time."

"And I hope for rain so I can play in the attic," announced Mary Jane. "We

haven't any attic and Betty has a lovely one, with boxes and things. I thought maybe we could borrow yours while we are here."

"Bless the child, and so you can," said grandmother, "you may have it every single day, if you like. But I know one thing. If this family is going to have dishes washed and beds made before church, they are going to have to hustle."

That ended the planmaking for the time being. Alice ran to set the bath room to rights and make beds, Mary Jane cleared off the table while grandmother put away food and then they did the dishes while grandfather finished his few chores and brought the car around. And in not much more than an hour they were off.

It seemed to the girls that the whole week went just like that. They would settle down, thinking they had lots of time and then, first thing you know, an hour, a half day, a day, would be gone and there were

only seven in the whole of their precious vacation.

Monday's washing was fun and so was the picnic; the garden was planted Tuesday in a new design that Alice thought quite an improvement on the old. By the time the planting was over, great thunder clouds began to pile up in the west and a spring shower chased the girls into the house and to the attic for fun.

"Now you two open anything you like," said grandmother, hospitably, as she bustled around pushing up window shades and moving things so the girls could have the best possible light. "None of the trunks are locked—there's no need in a place like this—and you can poke around and do anything."

"You're not going downstairs, grandmother?" exclaimed Alice, disappointedly, as she noticed that her grandmother was standing at the head of the stairs.

"Only for a little while," laughed Mrs.

Hodges. "But you don't need me, do you?"

"Indeed we do," cried Mary Jane, "we need you to tell us the stories of all the pretty things we find. How are we to know about things if you run away like that?"

"Well," grandmother hesitated. "I'll be back very soon," she decided, making up her mind. "The oven's going fine so I won't be long. If you find anything that looks as though it had a story, lay it aside till I come back." And off she hurried down the stairs.

"What has the oven being hot to do with her coming back?" questioned Mary Jane, as she watched Mrs. Hodges disappear. "Do you suppose she is going to bake?"

"Not likely," laughed Alice. "It's not quite four, yet. Though between you and me I'm as starved as though it was supper time.

"Let's open this big trunk first," she said, trying to change the subject so she would

forget that she felt hungry. "It looks as though it had dresses and maybe even hats—it's so big."

The hinges were worn and a bit rusty so both girls had to pull and tug to raise the lid. And such a funny inside as there was, when they did get it open.

The lid part had a big compartment opening with a cover like a door on which was a gay picture. Alice hastily peeped in and reported "shoes—lots of them!" before she looked in the boxes which made up the shallow tray. You'd hardly believe the lovely things in that tray! Purses, quaint and old, gloves, card cases—one made of mother-of-pearl which fairly sparkled it was so handsome—gloves, lace caps, handkerchiefs, ribbons stiff and firm even though very old—oh, it was a wonderful collection!

Mary Jane was almost afraid to touch anything. She looked and looked, while Alice very gently and tenderly turned things this way or that, so they could be

seen the better, but as for taking things out to play with them—well, one just couldn't.

"Let's wait till grandmother comes and have her show us," suggested Mary Jane wisely, so they shut the cover and opened the great deep hat box next. There were the funniest things you ever saw in your life! Great heavy hats so big and loaded with trimming that they had to be pinned on to women's hair—the pins were right there!

Alice set one on Mary Jane and it went down so far over her head that she couldn't see a thing. The girls went into such gales of laughter that Mrs. Hodges, coming up the stairs with a loaded tray, had to call twice to make herself heard.

"Oh, grandmother! You darling!" cried Alice when she spied her. "You've not brought us something to eat?"

"That I have," laughed grandmother, happily, "and you'll like it too. Hot baking powder biscuits, strawberry jam and



"Oh, grandmother! You darling!" cried Alice when she spied her.

cambric tea. Now pull up here by this window seat and we'll have a party."

"There's nobody as nice as my grandmother," cried Mary Jane, proving her statement with a big hug as soon as the tray was set down so she could.

"Just imagine anybody making such cunning biscuits as these in the middle of the afternoon," said Alice. "See, Mary Jane, there's plenty of butter and everything."

"Now you begin eating while I pour the tea," directed grandmother, and you may be sure no second invitation was needed.

When the pile of biscuits was decidedly lower, Alice remembered the tray of the trunk.

"If I'd take it out and bring it over here," she asked, "could you tell us about things?" And grandmother said, "Yes," she could. So the two girls set down their plates and cups and, lifting the tray out from the trunk, brought it over and set it across two stools, right close by their grandmother.

"There now," said Mary Jane, as she contentedly buttered another biscuit, "you can tell us all about things."

"I'll begin with this," grandmother decided, picking up a curious knitted bag on which were two rings. "This belonged to my mother when she was a little girl. It was her Sunday best pocket book and in it she carried her pennies to Sunday School. See, you put the money in one end, so. Then you slide the rings back—so—and there they are safe as can be."

"There's a penny in it now," said Mary Jane, fingering it gently.

"Yes, that's the lucky penny I had when I was a little girl," replied grandmother. "I carried it there from the time I was six years old. See—the figures are so worn you cannot tell what year it says."

"Don't you carry it any more now?" asked Mary Jane.

"Not for a long time," laughed her grandmother. "I think lucky pennies are more

for little girls than for old ladies. Your mother carried it for a long time and then, when she began going to high school, she felt so grown up she put it safely away and never carried it again. Would you like to carry it, Mary Jane?"

"Oh, would you let me grandmother?" asked Mary Jane, happily. "I'd love to. And I'll be so careful it'll never get lost." Grandmother knew she would be careful—but she didn't know how hard being careful might be and not so many months away, either. So Mary Jane took the penny and the bag too, to keep it in, and ran to put it at the head of the stairs ready to be taken down later.

To Alice, grandmother gave the mother-of-pearl card case because Alice admired it so very much. By that time, the biscuits were about eaten up and for some strange reason the girls were no longer hungry. So grandmother suggested that they put stools in front of the trunk and look at the dresses.

That was great fun because the frocks were so very different from any the girls had ever seen—great long skirts, tight waists, full sleeves—oh, very different!

“Oh, Mary Jane!” exclaimed Alice, as she held one up in front of herself, “wouldn’t it be fun to have costumes like these and act a play of ‘Little Women’?”

“Is there one?” asked Mary Jane.

“Frances and I could write it and we could all act it,” explained Alice.

“Then you take the dresses, dear,” said grandmother, generously. “I’d love to have you have them. Pick out the ones you want and we’ll express them to you if your father hasn’t room in his car for a box.”

“Oh, grandmother, you’re an angel dear!” exclaimed Alice, much to that little lady’s amusement.

Such fun as it was to pick out and try on frocks. They were still hard at it when grandfather called up from below, “Isn’t there going to be any supper in this house?”

"Mercy me!" exclaimed grandmother, "that's the first time I ever forgot his supper! Just drop everything, girls, and you can finish to-morrow!"

So with a scramble down the stairs, they left the attic while they hurried to get supper. And you may be sure that grandfather heard all about plans for the new play and praise of grandmother's lovely gifts while cooking and table setting were done.

A SPRING SNOW STORM

BY the end of the week when a telegram came from Mr. Merrill saying that he and Mrs. Merrill would arrive the next day and would drive the girls back to Chicago, these two busy young ladies had costumes and properties enough for three or four plays all picked out and ready to take home. Grandmother packed them so carefully that they all went into two medium sized boxes which she was sure Mr. Merrill could put in the car.

“We’re not going to *take* these things, you know, grandmother,” Alice insisted for the third or fourth time. “We’ll just borrow them for the play.”

“Don’t you worry, child,” Mrs. Hodges assured her. “You are more than welcome to keep them. But I know what a time your

dear mother has finding a place for all your things in a small city apartment. So if you get too crowded, send them back and I'll keep them for you till you have an attic of your own. But they're yours, yours and Mary Jane's, that is, and you may keep them wherever you like."

Mary Jane didn't pack the lucky penny for the very good reason that she didn't like to have it so far off as the middle of a packing box. She put it in the middle pocket of her own purse.

"Aren't you afraid you'll spend it by mistake?" Alice asked her, anxiously.

"I couldn't," replied Mary Jane. "'Cause I couldn't forget it. I'm remembering it all the time and that will keep me from making a mistake."

"But you might lose it," Alice reminded her.

"Now Alice, don't you be worrying about my lucky penny," laughed Mary Jane. "I won't spend it and I won't lose it, so there."

And that would have all been very nice—if things hadn't happened otherwise!

"I think it's going to snow to-day," remarked grandfather, coming in just then to wash up for dinner.

"Why grandfather!" laughed Mary Jane, immediately forgetting all about her penny and running to talk with him, "aren't you the silly person! It's so hot I went out without wearing a sweater this morning. Snow! I guess you're joking!"

"Would you like to see Maytime snow?" asked grandfather, keeping such a straight face that the girls were much puzzled as to what he might mean.

"Yes, I would," replied Mary Jane, "only there isn't any such thing."

"Is that so?" said Mr. Hodges, seriously. "Well, I suppose seeing as how you live in the city and go to school and all that, you must know everything there is. But if you haven't seen a May snow storm you have something to learn."

"Do you think it will be this afternoon?" asked Mrs. Hodges.

"Are you fooling, too," demanded Mary Jane, whirling around to see the expression on her grandmother's face.

"Not a bit," laughed that lady. "I love father's May snow and I always go out to be in it. I hoped it would come before you left."

"Well, I think it's about due," said grandfather. "Warm south wind, hot sun, and they've been out six days now."

"That's the funniest," said Alice, getting really interested. "Warm south wind, and hot sun don't sound much like a snow storm to me. And what has been out six days—not the wind, for it's been lovely every day—just as warm and nice."

"The corn bread is ready so no more talk now," grandmother reminded them, for while they had been chatting she had been taking good food from the oven. "Dinner is ready and then we'll see the snow."

All through the meal the two girls kept asking questions and trying to guess what the May snow was, but they didn't get a bit nearer the answer to the riddle than they were in the beginning.

"Can we see it now?" asked Alice, when the last piece of cocoanut custard pie was eaten and each girl had finished her second glass of milk.

"And leave the dishes?" asked Mary Jane wondering, for Alice was always so particular to help.

"They'll keep, never fear," laughed grandmother.

"But the snow isn't quite ready," said grandfather taking a look out of doors. "Give it an hour more and then I'll come for you," and off he went about his gardening.

"Now isn't he the *funniest!*" laughed Mary Jane as she began clearing off the table, stopping between every trip to look out into the warm sunshine. "Snow! He thinks he's teasing us."

"But you just wait and see who's surprised," laughed grandmother.

It was hard to wait a whole hour even though grandmother did try her best to think of jolly things to do in the meantime. So when grandfather came around the house in exactly one hour, he found two eager granddaughters awaiting him.

"Shall we get out fur coats?" teased Alice.

"No, but maybe an umbrella," replied Mr. Hodges unexpectedly, and so seriously that Alice couldn't help a hurried look skyward to reassure herself that the sun was still shining.

Grandmother went with them and there was very little talk—the girls were so excited they couldn't think of anything to say (which was a wonder) and grandmother and grandfather were enjoying their little joke without talking. Around the side of the house they went, across the yard, with Bob dashing along beside them in high glee.

No doubt he thought this expedition was for his amusement. Through the gate to the orchard—how sweet smelling it had been all the days of their visit—passed the plum and cherry trees and on over to the part where the apples grew.

"I know what you mean!" shouted Mary Jane, suddenly, as a puff of wind blew a swirl of fragrant petals into her face. "It's the trees that are snowing!"

"Now you've guessed," laughed grandmother, "and isn't it lovely?"

"Good enough to eat," said Alice, happily, as she too turned her face so that the wind blew petals on it.

"There is just one hour of the year when it's like this," grandmother went on to explain. "The blossoms must be old enough to be ready to lose their petals, the wind must be warm and stiff enough to pull the petals off."

"And of course the sun must shine," added Alice.

"But it doesn't always," said grandmother. "Sometimes the wind and blossoms are just right and there's a warm rain. Then it isn't so pretty to watch. But most years they come off in the sun as now. Father and I always come out to see them."

"Want to help the wind?" asked grandfather. The girls had not an idea what he meant but they were pretty sure they would like to do it. He helped them climb up into the nearest old apple tree and showed them how to shake the limbs so that a regular shower of blooms covered grandfather and grandmother till they were as white as though they were out in a really truly winter snow storm.

"Here's where we need an umbrella," laughed grandmother, "aren't the petals pretty?"

There's no telling how long they would have stayed there, the blossoms were so lovely, the air so sweet and grandfather in such a jolly mood, had not the honking of

an automobile horn sent them hurrying toward the house.

There by the front door was the Merrill machine with Mr. and Mrs. Merrill getting out and very much puzzled to get no answer from the silent house.

"Here's my mother!" shouted Mary Jane and with a hoop of joy she ran racing across the yard and into her mother's arms.

In the excited chatter of the next five minutes they learned that Mr. Merrill had decided that the weather was so wonderful he just must have two or three days out of doors. He and Mrs. Merrill had started very early that morning and would stay till Sunday morning when the four would drive back together as planned. A whole extra day and a half more than they had expected.

"Now that you're here, Daddah," said Alice, when the first rush of greeting was over and grandmother and Mary Jane had

hurried off to get some dinner for the travelers, "let's paint grandmother's kitchen chairs. She wants them done only I didn't know if I had better try them alone."

"Fine idea," approved Mr. Merrill. "As soon as we eat, I'll get into some of father Hodges' old togs and we'll begin. We'll get grandmother to let us paint on the side porch so as to lose none of this fine air."

As soon as the travelers' dinner was eaten—and you'd be surprised at the wonderful meal grandmother got from her pantry in almost no time at all!—and the snowy orchard was inspected, Alice and her father put on overalls, set out the kitchen chairs onto the side porch and began painting. It was a job Alice liked above everything else, and she was much thrilled to be doing it.

"We'll give them the first coat now," she planned, "and then late to-morrow they can have the second and be all done."

"May I help?" asked Mary Jane. She

wasn't supposed to be old enough to paint, but she wanted to try all the same.

"We've only two brushes," explained Mr. Merrill, "but maybe after awhile, you can use mine and try your hand at it."

Much comforted with that promise, Mary Jane went out to the barn to find her grandfather and got so interested helping him put fences along the runways for the baby chicks that she quite forgot about painting. Anyway, one can paint in the city and only in the country does one build yards for chickens.

Along the later part of the afternoon, when the fences were finished and grandfather had stopped for a bit of a rest, Mary Jane remarked, "we made some cookies this morning—grandmother and I did."

"You don't say," said grandfather, interestedly. "But what good do they do us here?"

"Suppose I go get some?" suggested Mary Jane, giggling happily.

"Suppose you do," replied grandfather,

seriously. "Do you know anyone who might eat some?"

"I know two," laughed Mary Jane, and off she ran toward the kitchen.

As she neared the house, what do you suppose she saw on the side porch? Bob, great shaggy Bob, with his paws on one of Alice's freshly painted chairs, trying to peer into the pantry window.

"Get down from here, Bob!" shouted Mary Jane. "Down sir!"

In a jiffy Bob was down but the damage had been done. The seat of the chair was all spoiled. No one was around in hearing, though Mary Jane called and called, so quickly taking the brush which she found laid with the paint pot, on a high shelf, she painted the seat very, very carefully, just as she had seen Alice do. Then washing her hands neatly, she packed a napkin full of cookies and, calling Bob to go along with her so he would be out of mischief, she ran back to her waiting grandfather.

"You did fine, Pussy," he said, when she told him what had delayed her. "I suspect that family of ours has gone visiting or exploring in the attic. Now what do you say that we shut Bob up till the paint is dry and then you and me go and get supper to surprise them?"

"Oh, let's," cried Mary Jane, delightedly.

And, if you had asked *her* you would have been told that the family had the best meal that evening that they had ever eaten—or at any rate, *one* of the best.

PLANS FOR THE SUMMER

AFTER Mary Jane returned from her visit at Grandmother Hodges—all loaded down with jolly things from the attic, delicious goodies to eat and lovely spring flowers from the woods back of the orchard, the days seemed to fairly fly past.

The play "Little Women" was written by Alice and Frances and acted with such success that it had to be given at school. How much of this success was due to the writing, how much to the excellent acting and how much to the very interesting old costumes, it would be hard to say. But certainly all the children who were lucky enough to see it, had a beautiful time and wanted the J. F. F. Club to hurry up and give another one, *very* soon.

Then, of course, spring time arrived in

the city. There were no orchards full of blossoms nor brooks with buttercups beside them, nor tiny chickens to admire and feed. But there were lovely parks filled with migrating birds and picnics to the forest preserves and jolly Saturdays and Sundays when the Merrills went out and made garden at their little summer home. (Maybe you have read all such fun in *Mary Jane's Summer Home*.)

Of all these jolly stunts, the one that interested Mary Jane the most this particular spring was the birds. She had never noticed them much before, and thought it great fun to take the new bird glasses her father gave her and go to the Wooded Island in Jackson Park and watch for new comers. Alice had a little note book in which she wrote the description of each different bird—the color and size and such, you know, and the date and place she saw it. Mary Jane intended to have such a book for herself next year, but this first season, it kept her busy watch-

ing in the half bare branches of the trees for the flash of yellow or blue or brown that told of a visitor.

But alas! The migrating birds do not stay! Not even in such a lovely, sheltered place as an island in the park. Mary Jane and Alice were glad they had seen so many and they resolved that next year they would study up, have note books and glasses ready and waiting so that they could add many new birds to their list.

One evening at dinner, while Mary Jane was lamenting that the prettiest birds were all gone, Mr. Merrill remarked, "To be sure they are. They had better be moving along if they want to get their nests built by summer—they were late as it was."

"Late!" exclaimed Alice. "Why Dad-dah! Aren't you funny! It's ages till summer."

"Is that so?" laughed her father, teasingly. "Well you just look at the calendar. What I was thinking about this afternoon

was your summer vacation. What are you going to do then?"

"Summer vacation?" questioned Mary Jane. "We've just had our spring vacation."

"Oh, to be sure," laughed Mr. Merrill, "but if you think hard, you will see that it is a good long time since you came back from grandmother's. You've had plays and been so busy with those and with birds and gardens that you haven't noticed. But I think this family had better be getting their heads together and plan something for summer."

"Aren't we going to the country this year?" asked Mrs. Merrill, who was as much surprised as the girls at their father's talk.

"Oh, to be sure," he replied. "That's for most of the summer. But we want to have an extra vacation of a week or two. Where would you like to go?"

Where would they? Mary Jane felt as though someone was giving her a magic map

and saying, "Point where you want to go."

"Could we go on a boat?" she asked.

"U-um, let's see," said Mr. Merrill, thoughtfully.

"Oh, yes, let's go on a boat," cried Alice, thrilled with the idea.

"We might take a trip on the lakes," said Mrs. Merrill.

"On Plum Lake?" asked Mary Jane.

"No, I mean on the great lakes."

"On a big boat where you can sleep and eat?" asked Mary Jane, breathlessly.

"Yes, we might do that," said Mr. Merrill.

"Oh, Daddah, let's," cried Mary Jane, happily. "Even if we didn't stay mor'n a week. I'd love to sleep on a boat and eat and everything. Could we get one here in Chicago?"

"Yes, we can get a big boat from the Municipal pier," replied Mr. Merrill. "I think that's not a bad idea, Pussy. We'll look into it right away."

So the next noon, he got folders for the girls to read and began making plans of what could be done and when. First thing Mary Jane knew school was nearly out; the Holdens were leaving for the country; summer was at hand.

It was decided to take the trip in the very middle of the summer. By this plan everyone could enjoy a month of the country, could sleep late, take walks and get well refreshed from the winter in the city. Then, the last of July and first of August they could take the lake trip, getting back in time to enjoy the first ear of home grown sweet corn—Mr. Merrill was as particular about that as were the two girls.

It seemed to Mary Jane that days never had gone by so swiftly. School was soon over; the apartment closed and the little home in the woods opened and the garden bloomed in summer glory. First thing she knew it was time to say "Next week we are going on our trip through the Great Lakes!"

There wasn't much getting ready to do for a trip like that. Alice and Mary Jane had their pretty little dark silk frocks, with hats to match, that they had purchased new for the trip to grandmother's in the spring. These, with linen frocks and matching sweaters and a couple of gingham dresses for playing on shipboard, would be all they could bother with in the small amount of luggage they meant to carry.

In the late afternoon of a hot July day, Mrs. Merrill and the two girls shut up the cottage in the woods, and drove into the city where they left the car at a garage for safe keeping while they were away. Then they met Mr. Merrill at the entrance of the great pier.

"Follow closely," he told them, "for this is the busy season and there's a crowd."

Mary Jane looked around but it didn't seem to her that there was much of a crowd. But as they went further on the great pier, there were more and more people

around, men calling for this boat; trunks unloading for that—till she had to watch hard and almost run to keep close to her father.

“Oh, Daddah,” she called suddenly, “do let’s stop and see this!” She had just spied a whole truck-load of cunning little lambs. They were sticking their heads out of the crates and “baa”-ing as hard as ever they could. Whoever would have supposed *lambs* would be there?

Of course she thought her father heard, he was right there when she spoke, so she stopped to watch the cunning, forlorn little creatures.

“You won’t kill them?” she asked a porter, anxiously.

“Not these, little lady,” replied the man, kindly. “These are from an estate over in Michigan, these are. They’re going to Washington Park—new style lawnmowers we call them.”

“Oh, I know,” laughed Mary Jane, much

relieved. "I live near there. I've seen the sheep eating the grass lots of times.

"Alice! Look!"

There was no answering sister close by.

Mary Jane looked around in surprise but not a sign of her family did she see. There were plenty of people—deck porters, expressmen, truckers, tourists—men, women and children all hurrying to their boats. But in all the crowd that was getting bigger and bigger with every passing minute, Mary Jane failed to find her family.

She clutched her little hand bag tightly and resolved to be very brave and to wait right there till she should be found just as her father had always told her to, in case she should be lost.

"All aboard!" shouted a voice close by.

"Boat leaves in three minutes! All aboard!"

Mary Jane was panic stricken. Was that their boat? Should she get on it, supposing it was? Or should she wait—as her

father had told her—wait till she was found?

“All aboard! Visitors ashore! All aboard!”

What *should* she do?

Then suddenly, she wasn't afraid at all. Many times her father had told her that if she was lost she should wait, not run around wildly, looking for him. Now a *little* girl might get excited and forget, but Mary Jane wasn't a little girl like she used to be, she was plenty old enough to remember and to obey what her father had said. So she stood out in the passage where she could be seen—as much as anyone could be in the increasing crowd—and there she waited as patiently as she could, in spite of the fact that “All aboard!” was called again and that the ropes were thrown off and the engine started on the nearest boat.

It seemed hours and hours that she waited. Really it was only about three minutes—maybe not quite that long—till Mr. Merrill

missed Mary Jane. He looked back but she wasn't in sight so he said to Mrs. Merrill, "you and Alice go straight along this passage till you come to the third boat. Wait there at the gangplank for us. Mary Jane can't be very far for she'll know better than to run around hunting us."

With that remark, he turned back and after walking a few steps, came upon his little daughter. My! but she was glad to see him! And so pleased when he praised her for remembering to stand still and be found.

"But we'll have to run for the boat—it's going!" cried Mary Jane eagerly, as she grabbed his hand and started away.

"No such hurry," laughed her father. "That's a little bit of boat that just goes along the shore a way. Wait till you see ours! And we don't pull out for more than an hour yet so there is plenty of time, Pussy."

That gave Mary Jane a chance to show

her father the crate of lambs and to tell him about their destination, and she was glad of that.

They met Alice and Mrs. Merrill and after showing their tickets at the gangplank, went on board the big boat. Mary Jane looked to make sure—yes, they were all four really on board. Now the deck man could call “All Aboard!” any time he liked and it wouldn’t bother her a bit. No member of the Merrill family could be left, anyway. They were on board and ready for a week of fun.

A LUCKY ACCIDENT

UP the stairs to the second deck of the boat they went, Mary Jane clutching her little hand bag tightly and following her father, who, tickets in hand, was helping the porter find their rooms and get them settled for the journey. But they didn't stop on the second deck. Not till they were high above the clammer of loading and packing to the clean airy part of the deck, did they stop. With a great key the porter unlocked first one door and then the next and threw open two very pretty rooms with double berths and a connecting door and nice wide windows.

"There, sir," he said, hesitating for his fee, "I think you'll be very comfortable, sir. Call me if you need anything. Thank you, sir." And off he went for another job—this was a busy hour.

"Isn't it wonderful!" exclaimed Mary Jane, happily, as she made a hurried trip of exploration through the two staterooms. "We've a washstand and so have you. We've a big cupboard—could we hang our dresses there now?"

Seeing that Mary Jane really wanted to unpack, Mrs. Merrill agreed.

"There is still plenty of time before we go," she said. "You may unpack most of your things—the dresses and sweaters—and hang them up and put the bags under the berth. Then we'll go out on deck to watch the fun of leaving. I wouldn't miss that for the unpacking, for we could do the rest after dark."

However, with two busy girls, unpacking didn't take long. The dresses and middies were carefully hung on the hangers Mary Jane found in the closet; brushes were laid neatly on the little shelf at the side of the washstand and the room was in first class order at least five minutes before Mrs. Mer-

rill called that she and Mr. Merrill had unpacked too, and were ready to go on deck.

"We'll find some chairs near the wharf side," said Mr. Merrill, "then we can see the last of the crowd come rushing on, see the crew cast off the ropes and watch us pull away from the dock. All that is some of the best fun of the trip, seems to me."

Three chairs were there handy in just the place Mr. Merrill wanted to be and a little hunting located a fourth which he quickly brought over with the others.

"Just look at the people that come late!" exclaimed Mary Jane, who now that her father has settled too, could watch the sights in comfort. "Don't they know it's nearly time to go?"

"To be sure they do," laughed her mother, "but some people always take chances, and come dashing on at the last minute. Look! See those big trunks! Isn't it fun to watch the boat be loaded?"

Indeed it was! Just like a movie, in fact,

with something different happening every minute. Someone driving a car on to the boat; someone staggering under golf clubs; someone else with a canoe and someone with three great beautiful dogs that pulled and strained at their leashes.

Mary Jane got so interested watching the dogs and the argument the officer was having with the owner as to where the dogs could be allowed to stay that she leaned over the rail—farther and farther till—suddenly there was a shriek and Mary Jane's distressed voice called above the clamour, "My bag! My bag! I dropped my bag!" Her precious purse had slipped from her hand, off the boat!

"Your bag?" questioned Mrs. Merrill in amazement, "why, darling, you unpacked that and left it in your stateroom."

"No, my *own* bag!" insisted Mary Jane, nearly in tears. "My purse, my pocket book my money—oh, it's dropped into the lake."

"Don't worry, dear," said Alice, trying to

offer big sisterly comfort, "I'll give you half of my money. Your purse wasn't so new, dear—and had nothing in it but money and a kerchief."

"Oh, but it *did*!" cried Mary Jane. "It had my lucky penny that grandmother gave me! Oh, I must get it out of the water—grandmother will think I'm so careless—and I guess I am to drop the purse like that."

All this time Mr. Merrill had been running down to a lower deck and now he called up to his family, "Mary Jane, dear! Look! Tell me where it went!"

Mary Jane looked down into the little crack of water between the boat and the dock, but not a sign of her bag could she see.

"I lost it right down here, Daddah," she said sadly. "But it must have gone into the water. There wasn't any place else for it to go. Will it come up so we can fish it out?"

"Probably not," said her father, regretfully, "but we'll look to be sure. You watch

for it while I get closer." He went on down to the water level deck.

Mary Jane's cry and the conversation between her and her father had drawn the attention of many persons on the boat. They leaned over the rail and watched idly hoping the little girl would find her purse but not doing anything to help. Perhaps there wasn't really anything one could do.

But before Mr. Merrill reached the water level deck, Mary Jane heard a voice from somewhere in the boat call, "Here! I see it! I'll get it for her!"

She looked and looked and *looked* but she couldn't for the life of her see anything though she squinted her eyes hard and looked just exactly at the place where it must have hit the water.

"I think I'll go down, too, and see," she said to her mother, excitedly.

"Indeed, no, you stay right here," said Mrs. Merrill positively. "Running around on a boat that is about ready to leave is no

thing for a little girl to do. Suppose someone should find your purse and hold it up for you to identify—where would you be then?” she added.

“Identify?” questioned Mary Jane, not quite understanding.

“Yes, suppose they should find it and call up to say, ‘who is the owner of this?’ You should be here in plain sight to call back, ‘it’s mine, thank you!’ before anyone else could claim it.”

That seemed a good reason for staying there, even if one was most impatient, so Mary Jane sat on the edge of her chair and leaned watchfully over the rail.

“There! See! It hit the rope and bounced!” shouted the same voice that had shouted a few seconds before.

At that minute a boy climbed out from the boat, crawled along the rope that stretched across the water to the dock, and hung by one hand on the edge of the pier.

So dangerous was his position that the

people on the boat watched breathlessly and hardly a word was spoken.

With the free hand, he reached under the pier, groped a second and then drew out—yes, it really was it—Mary Jane's purse, high and dry and entirely unharmed.

All this takes much longer to read about than to happen. It was done so quickly that by the time Mr. Merrill had hurried from the foot of the lower stairway to the front part of the boat where the boy had climbed out, the youngster had the purse in his hand and was ready to return along the rope.

There were shouts of praise and approval, you may be sure while he crawled back as easily as a cat and handed the purse to Mary Jane's father.

"I'll not try to tell you thank you here," said Mr. Merrill, "for my family will want to hear about how you happened to find it and to thank you for your skillful work. Will you come up with me and deliver it to the owner yourself?"

The boy plainly did not care for much fuss. He looked around uncomfortably but Mr. Merrill's kindly smile encouraged him to follow along up the stairs. They didn't attempt any talk for people called approvingly, slapped the boy cordially on the back and generally made him know that they thought he had done a very clever stunt. He was glad to get to the quieter part of the deck where the Merrills were and to meet the two girls.

"I'm Dave Hiltan," he said, as Mr. Merrill hesitated a second for a name.

"We're very grateful to you, Dave," said Mrs. Merrill. "You rescued even more than you thought for Mary Jane here, had put her grandmother's lucky penny in the purse and she values it much more than any mere cash. This is my daughter Alice and this is Mary Jane—she will want to thank you herself."

"And I want to know how you thought of looking for the purse where you found it,"

added Alice after Mary Jane had thanked him her prettiest and oh, so sincerely.

"That was luck," said Dave, very glad to have something beside thank-yous to talk about. "I was leaning over the lower deck not more than twenty feet from where the purse dropped. I saw it come; saw it hit the rope and bounce anglewise and just barely catch on that ledge instead of splashing into the water."

"I didn't see that at all," exclaimed Mary Jane in amazement.

"I was nearer," explained Dave, "because I was on the lower deck. And I just happened to see it—you were looking down onto the shadows while I looked across. There's a lot of difference."

"But how did you know about climbing out on the rope?" asked Alice, admiringly.

"Oh, that was easy as pie," laughed the boy. "You see, I'm a boy scout and we learned how to climb and walk ropes last winter. I knew I could easily go that little

way for I have crawled along a smaller rope than that and for a much longer distance."

"Did you really?" exclaimed Alice, while Mary Jane clutched her bag and looked more admiration than she could possibly express.

The girls soon found that the boy was about Alice's age, that he and his sister were going with an aunt to their summer home in northern Michigan and that they were to be fellow passengers for more than a day.

By this time the warning whistle blew and ropes were cast off. The crowd on the dock pushed back as the gangplank was hauled in and, with a final shriek of the whistle, the boat pulled away.

Dave went to find his sister and aunt and he promised to look the Merrills up just as soon as he could and predicted that they would all have some fun together in the morning.

Mary Jane sat back and watched the lights of the city, flickering in the gathering

twilight and fading, fading, as the great boat steamed out into the lake. Somehow, she didn't feel much like talking. It was fun enough to hold her bag tightly, so it couldn't possibly slip away, to know that her mother and father and Alice were close by and that they were all on a floating home where they would fun aplenty in the days to come. Finally her eyes drooped and she hardly knew what was happening when she went in to bed and dropped to sleep with stars peeking in through the window at her and the lap of the water against the boat making a sweet, sleepy sound, "goodnight, night! night!"

A BIRTHDAY ON BOARD THE BOAT

IS this where the little girl that lost her pocket book lives?"

"Hush! People aren't up yet, dear! You mustn't waken anyone."

"But this is her room, isn't it?" repeated the first voice, a little lower but very insistent.

"I think maybe so," replied the second voice in a very small whisper. "We'll ask Dave if you want to make sure. But come on outside now, dear, and do be quiet."

Footsteps grew fainter and fainter until there wasn't any sound but a swish and a beat, beat—Mary Jane couldn't for the life of her think where she was! It certainly wasn't home, there wasn't a sound that seemed homelike. Where was she?

Sleepily, she opened one eye onto the pretty stateroom. There were her clothes

spread neatly over a chair, there was the tiny window with a breeze blowing at the white curtains—but what in the world was this ceiling thing right down so close over her head? Suddenly she remembered everything. She was on the boat; she had her purse—yes, there it was under her pillow just where she had sleepily tucked it the night before; Alice was sleeping in the upper berth and they were off on their vacation.

Quickly raising herself on her knees, she climbed high enough to peek over the edge of Alice's berth.

"I think we ought to wake up," she announced to her sleeping sister. "Someone's just been past here hunting us. I know they were 'cause they said, 'here's where the little girl who lost her purse is.' I just barely heard them as I waked up. Let's dress as fast as we can and go on deck and see if there are any girls to play with."

Once wakened, a person really wouldn't care to sleep more with all that lovely sun-

shine and the fresh air blowing in so briskly. Alice gave one good stretch and then slid down from her berth and began dressing so fast that Mary Jane had to work hard not to be beaten. As it was, they tied, with both girls knocking on their mother's door at the same minute. There wasn't any answer and after waiting a second, Alice peeked in to discover an empty room. Evidently other people liked to get up and out, too.

A quick search on the deck discovered the missing parents and all four went down to a very gay breakfast.

"The first thing we shall do now," remarked Mr. Merrill when they had finished eating, "is to hunt up the purser and have your bag locked up in the safe."

"Why, Daddah!" exclaimed Mary Jane in surprise, "what for?"

"For safety," said her father. "There is no use having the worry of holding that purse tightly all the days of our trip, Mary Jane. And as for leaving it in the state-

room, that isn't so good either for someone, seeing all the fuss we make over it might think it held something of great value—to them, I mean of course,” he added as he saw Mary Jane was about to say, “but it has!” “I don't want the responsibility of grandmother's lucky penny any more.”

Taking Mary Jane with him, he went down to the office and there found a very kindly purser who was willing to lock the purse in a safe for them. He gave Mary Jane a receipt which she gave to her father for keeping as he could carry it in his pocket book with other papers.

“Now that's off our minds,” remarked Mr. Merrill, as they started back up to the deck, “what shall we do next?”

“I'd like to look all over the boat,” said Mary Jane. “Do they have a regular kitchen and everything? And I would like to see that girl who talked outside my room this morning,” she added, remembering that that had been her first wish.

"Yes, they have a kitchen, though not much like any you have seen," replied Mr. Merrill. "Maybe we can do both your wishes. Let's look around on deck and see if your little girl is around. We could take her with us on our exploring trip."

They walked up to the bow of the boat and there found that Mrs. Merrill and Alice were talking to Dave and his sister—they could tell it was his sister because she looked so much like him.

"Here's Mary Jane," exclaimed Alice much pleased that her sister had come so soon "honey, this is Sally Ann, Dave's sister. And what do you suppose? To-day's her birthday. She's eight years old."

"I guess that's pretty old," said Sally Ann, proudly, and the minute she spoke, Mary Jane knew she was the girl who had talked outside her door that morning. The voice was unmistakably the same.

"It's wonderful!" cried Mary Jane. "I'd

love to have a birthday on a boat. What shall you do all day?"

"That's something she doesn't know yet," replied Dave, laughing at Mary Jane's eagerness. "She has been up since dawn, I do believe, and asking for you all the time, Mary Jane. Now that you are found, maybe we can begin a celebration."

"Perhaps we might even take a walk," suggested Mr. Merrill, who saw that the children were a bit puzzled as to just how to begin their acquaintance.

"A walk?" asked Sally Ann, looking out across the water.

"On the boat, not the water," laughed Mr. Merrill. "Mary Jane was curious about the kitchens and I had promised her she should see them and maybe the engines, too. Wouldn't it be fun to go now and then you would feel very well acquainted with your boat-home."

The two little girls thought that would be very jolly and Alice and Dave begged

permission to go along too. So Mrs. Merrill and Dave's aunt pulled up easy chairs for a nice chat while the others were gone.

The children were thrilled at the sight of the powerful engines going round and round so rapidly and were delighted to hear about how the boat was pushed through the water. But the kitchens, while of course less thrilling, were even more fun to see for the cooks looked very interesting in their white coats and caps and the preparations for luncheon, already under way, looked most appetizing.

"Getting up an appetite for luncheon?" asked the head steward as he passed them in the dining hall.

"Yes, and you'll have a good menu, too," laughed Alice, who had made friends with him at breakfast. "Sally Ann has a birthday and you'll have to have her birthday dinner awfully good seeing she is away from home."

"Glad you told me," said the steward, interestedly. "We always like to know

about such things.” Then as Sally Ann and Dave, talking to Mr. Merrill, went on ahead, he added in a low voice, “come back to my office whenever you can. I want to ask you something.” Then seeing the others turn back to ask why Alice and Mary Jane were so slow, he put his finger in his lips to tell them that it was a secret, and stepped aside for them to pass.

Alice could hardly wait till she and Mary Jane could get together and compare ideas as to what the secret might be and as for Mary Jane, she was nearly bursting with excitement. But the others were chattering away and Dave suggested deck golf and brought his clubs so quickly there was no chance for even a whisper for nearly an hour.

Then, Alice managed to whisper, “could we say we wanted to straighten our rooms or something so we could go back to his office?”

“Maybe if we’d tell mother she could find a way,” suggested Mary Jane.

"He said a secret," said Alice, doubtfully.

"But he would expect us to tell mother," insisted Mary Jane, "she wouldn't count like Sally Ann and Dave. I'm going to tell her."

Slipping away just after her turn at the ball, Mary Jane ran up to her mother who fortunately was alone for a few minutes. Very quickly she told the story of their brief conversation with the steward and Mrs. Merrill agreed to help them get away soon.

"Run back and play another round so they won't suspect," said Mrs. Merrill "and then I'll call you."

In about ten minutes she called Alice and Mary Jane. "I hate to interrupt your fun," she said, "especially on a birthday. But my girls haven't tidied their room yet. Couldn't you have a recess of fifteen minutes and then play some more?"

That seemed quite reasonable, so without a suspicion from Sally Ann the girls ran

down to their stateroom. Never did a room get such a quick setting in order. Fortunately the stewardess had been in so all the girls had to do was tidy personal things and that took only a couple of minutes. Then, Mrs. Merrill going with them, they slipped down to the dining steward's office.

"Yes, I had a fine idea," said the jovial steward, much pleased with himself. "We haven't had a birthday an board for some time—that is, none that I have known about. Now what would you think of an afternoon party with a birthday cake and candles and all that?"

"Really!" exclaimed Mary Jane, in delight. "If you ask *me*, I think it is a fine idea, I do."

"A surprise party?" asked Alice, "I think it would be wonderful."

"But could you do all that?" asked Mrs. Merrill.

"We not only can, but we are going to," said the steward, decidedly. "It will be fun

for everyone and we like folks to have a good time. Come with me, now while we talk to the chef. We want ice cream and birthday cake enough for all the children on board and there are at least twenty."

Mary Jane opened her eyes at that for she hadn't seen nearly that many yet, but then, she had been so busy, she hadn't looked very far.

The chef grinned broadly at the suggestion of a birthday cake.

"How old is she?" he asked, first thing.

"Eight years old," Mary Jane told him.

"That's all I need to know," said he, "just the years so we get the candles right. Now run along while we get busy. And if you don't say it's the prettiest cake you ever saw and the best strawberry ice cream—Hi there! Ed!" he shouted to his assistant, "Get up a gallon of berries and put the boys to hulling them. Make it snappy!"

The girls would have liked to linger and see more of the fascinating preparations but

they knew that if they were gone too long, Dave and Sally Ann would come to the staterooms, hunting them and then the secret might leak out. So, regretfully, they went back on deck where Dave, seeing that Sally Ann was tired of golf, had established a parchesi board and was waiting for a partner to play.

But Mary Jane and Alice were much too excited to settle down to such a quiet game so Mrs. Merrill, seeing how hard it was for them, suggested that they get some other children and get up a pantomine.

"You can practice this morning and act it this afternoon," she added. "Maybe you could even interest the captain and he will let you act it in the main cabin—after you have practiced nicely."

In a second, Alice and Mary Jane saw what she had in mind—that is, that in this way, they would not only find something interesting to do, but would have an excuse for getting all the children together for the

party. So they began planning at once.

Sally Ann and Dave had never acted plays but they knew how to do charades. Of course Alice had to tell them about the J. F. F. club and the fun it had been so by the time they got ready to really do the charades it was almost noon.

On the way down to luncheon Alice met the captain and told him about the plan for charades. He was so interested that he not only promised them the use of the cabin for their show but he suggested that the plan be announced at luncheon. Then all the children aboard would know what was going on.

Alice approved so he tapped a gong and told everyone that there would be charades at three-thirty and a rehearsal for all children who would like to take part, at two.

That left a very little time for making plans but with four heads together, there was a lot done and by two o'clock everything was ready for the dozen or more chil-

dren who had waited outside the closed doors of the cabin.

Alice and Dave were made captains and they chose sides like an old fashioned spelling match and then each side planned two charades. Such a scurrying for costumes, and cudgeling of brains for ideas you never saw! But it was very satisfactory and the audience of grown folk who assembled at three-thirty were highly pleased.

Just as the last charade was ended and while people were still guessing what it could be, the steward beckoned to Mary Jane to come outside the room. She slipped away so quietly that she wasn't missed and closed the door carefully behind her.

"Here's the cake," he said, lifting a paper away from the biggest cake Mary Jane had ever seen. It was pink and white and at least six stories high and had roses and pink candles and silver balls over the top.

"Oh!" cried Mary Jane breathlessly, "isn't it *lovely*!"

"Can you carry it?" he asked, much pleased.

"Yes, I'm strong," replied Mary Jane, "I'm sure I can carry it by myself."

He lit the candles, gave the signal to the band, hidden in a corner of the hall and then opened the door into the big cabin.

The sound of the music made everyone turn to look and there was Mary Jane, coming through the door with the lighted birthday cake! She went straight up to Sally Ann and set the cake on a little table close in front of where she was standing. Sally Ann was that surprised she hardly knew what was happening as Alice handed her a knife and the steward told her to "Cut your cake, Miss Birthday Lady! There's plenty for all!"

Indeed there was, and ice cream, too, and everyone had such a fine time that the birthday on board was a big success.

LOOKING AHEAD

THE four children had such a good time together all the birthday and the day following that they felt like old, old friends and were very sorry that Dave and Sally Ann must get off in the afternoon of the second day out. Indeed, they had had so much fun that they had hardly paid any attention to the stops that were made or to anything besides their own affairs.

So when their aunt told them that play was over; they must make themselves tidy to get off in half an hour, there were some very long faces.

"Couldn't we get off, too," suggested Mary Jane a little later as they stood on the dock and watched the boat draw nearer and nearer the wharf where the brother and sister were to leave.

"Hardly," laughed Mary Jane's mother,

“plans aren’t made to change so quickly. Think of all the rest of our journey we have yet to make.”

But Mary Jane didn’t like to think of that for Sally Ann wouldn’t be along. Instead she and Sally Ann exchanged addresses and hoped they would see each other again sometime.

As the boat bumped to the wharf, Sally Ann cried eagerly, “There’s my mother! Maybe she’ll come on board to get us and then you can talk to her.” She pointed to a very pretty lady, all neatly hatted and dressed as for traveling. “That’s funny,” mused Sally Ann, as she noticed her mother’s dress. “She usually wears my favorite pink dress when I’ve been away. I wonder why she has on the dark blue one.”

“Look at Dad!” laughed Dave, at the same time, “all dolled up to meet us. Can’t see how mother ever persuaded him to change from his golf clothes.”

The mother and father on the wharf were

eagerly scanning the faces on the deck in the hope of seeing their children. Dave and Sally Ann waved and shouted and in a minute were discovered.

"Don't get off! Wait for us!" shouted Dave's father, cupping his hands together around his mouth so that his words would carry over the din.

"Do you suppose we're going to stay on and they're coming too?" asked Sally Ann. It seemed almost too good to be likely.

Very soon, Mr. and Mrs. Hiltan got aboard and hurried up to where their children were waiting.

"Are you *very* tired of the boat?" Mary Jane heard them ask.

"Could you stand a few more days?"

"Stand a few more days?"—Mary Jane knew she should not listen but when people are so near and talk so you just can't *help* but hear, what is a girl to do?

"Are we going to stay aboard?" demanded Sally Ann.

"And you go with us?" asked Dave.

"It's this way," said Mrs. Hiltan. "Your father has a telegram telling him of business in Buffalo and I thought maybe, if you two didn't mind, we'd go too, visit Cousin Jane for two days and come back with father. How about it?"

"We'd love it," cried Sally Ann, "and so would Mary Jane!"

After that introductions were made and there was such a babel of talk that it's a wonder Mrs. Hiltan understood anything at all about the birthday party and charades and fun the four children had been having together. But she got the idea that everyone was very happy to have the trip continue and that was the main point.

Mr. Hiltan went to see about his luggage and Mrs. Hiltan invited the children—the four of them—to her stateroom to unpack the birthday boxes she had brought to Sally Ann. There was fruit and cake and cookies and candy and nuts and so many goodies

that there was another birthday party on the spot.

"I like having a birthday on a boat," said Sally Ann, between bites. "'Cause then I have two birthdays, one yesterday and this one."

It's a pity there isn't time to tell all the fun those children had as the great boat took them through the Straits, through the famous locks and down the picturesque St. Mary's River. There was so much to see and so much to do that hours simply flew by, without half they intended to do getting done.

"We'll be in Detroit before long," said Mr. Merrill, along the middle of a busy afternoon. "You must all plan to be on deck as we pass Belle Isle and near the city for it's a fine sight."

"How much time do we have?" asked Dave.

"Oh, plenty," replied Mr. Merrill. "We haven't been in the Detroit River but a few

minutes. But keep your eye on the shore so as not to miss anything."

"Two hours in Detroit! Two hours in Detroit!" shouted a boy who went along the deck just then, beating a great tray to call attention to his announcement.

"What do you say to taking these children for a ride in Detroit," Mr. Hiltan asked Mr. Merrill. "We ought to have plenty of time and they would enjoy it."

"Good idea," said Mr. Merrill, "only they ride so much at home. "What would you think of taking the ferry to Belle Isle—it only takes fifteen minutes—and let them run around on the ground awhile."

"Wouldn't we get left?" asked Mary Jane, who wanted to go but also wanted to stay safely on the big boat.

"Not us!" laughed Mr. Hiltan. "It's a fine idea. Get your hats, people, and be ready to leave the boat the minute it docks. I'll speak to the captain, tell him our plan and find out just how much time we have."

"Two hours surely, though it may be even a little longer, he says, as something about the engine has to be looked into," reported Mr. Hiltan. "And the boats go every fifteen minutes so we can have our run on shore very comfortably—stay a full hour and still have ample time to spare."

The children made a dash for hats and sweaters for the breeze from up the lake was cool even though it was mid-summer and as soon as the boat docked, they got off.

Three docks away there was a great sign which announced steamers for Belle Isle. One was just leaving so no time was lost getting away.

It was great fun being on the shore again. The minute the ferry docked, the four children ran from the boat to the merry-go-round near by, on which Mr. Hiltan had promised them all a ride. Then they wanted to go in bathing. Mrs. Hiltan thought that would be fun as it was so different from anything they could do on shipboard. So

bath houses were engaged and they all went swimming.

"Now we must take the very next ferry," said Mrs. Merrill, firmly as she saw one pull away from the pier. "We don't want to be late so we had better start now."

They strolled down to the Ferry dock but no boat arrived. Ten minutes passed: fifteen; but there was no boat.

Finally Mr. Merrill went to the ticket window to enquire.

"No there won't be any ferry for twenty-five minutes yet. They go every forty minutes."

"But they used to be every fifteen," exclaimed Mr. Merrill.

"Yes, sir, when there was no other way of getting here," agreed the man. "But now so many come by the bridge that we've cut down the boat service."

"Could I get a car that would get us in quicker?" asked Mr. Merrill, anxiously.

"You could get a car but I don't know as

you'd make any time at that," replied the man, thoughtfully. "Traffic's so heavy that if you want to make time—

"I say, Bill!" he interrupted himself to shout to someone.

"Here's some folks want to get back to the city ahead of our next boat. How about it?"

"Five bones!" was the reply, which Mary Jane thought was an awfully queer answer.

"What's the idea?" asked Mr. Hiltan.

"This man has a good little motor boat and for five dollars, he will take you to your wharf right now," explained the ticket man.

"That's a fine idea," said Mr. Merrill, "provided he has a good boat. Let's see it quickly."

The boat proved to be a very nice little motor boat, not large, but plenty big for eight passengers. So without wasting any time in talk, they got aboard and set off for the city. The children were much thrilled, for coming down the river they had

admired the little boats that darted in and out among the great freighters and now to be riding in one themselves! Well, it surely seemed like a story book!

They arrived at their boat in ample time and settled themselves on deck so as to miss nothing of the fun of departure. You can imagine how excited they were when their big boat pulled away *just* before the arrival of the first ferry from Belle Isle—that made their expedition all the more thrilling.

The rest of their vacation journey was very jolly and the two families parted good friends with high hopes of seeing more of each other at some future time.

From Buffalo the Merrills took the train back to Chicago and by noon the next day were back in their little home in the woods.

That evening as they lingered over their dinner, talking of the fun they had had on their trip, Mary Jane said, "I do love going on a boat, Daddah. I wish I could go on one for another week, really I do."

"You do like it, don't you, dear," agreed her father. "Maybe some time we can go for a long, long trip."

"Could we really?" cried Mary Jane, happily.

"Could we go to Europe?" asked Alice.

"Now you're asking something pretty big," said Mrs. Merrill, seriously. "But I must admit I have often thought about it. Alice is studying history and doing so well and Mary Jane is getting old enough to understand and remember what she sees. I wonder—" her voice trailed off without finishing her sentence.

"Oh, mother! do you suppose we *could*?" cried Alice eagerly. "I'd study so hard and learn so much!"

"And we could talk French and see castles and cross the ocean," cried Mary Jane. "Yes, let's do go!"

"I've thought about it a lot," admitted Mr. Merrill. "It would cost a great deal of money. Perhaps next summer we could

stay at home and save our pennies and get our fun making plans. Then the next year—well, I'd hate to promise. But let's see—maybe we could do it."

"I know we can!" cried Mary Jane happily. "I'll save all my pennies—the lucky one and every single other one. You just see, Daddah!"

Indeed, so well were plans made that in a few weeks less than two years from that evening, the Merrill family really did sail for Europe. If you want to know of the sights they saw and good times they had, you can read about them in the next book of the Mary Jane Series which is entitled

Mary Jane in England.

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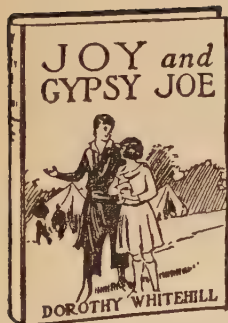
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